

## RADICAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS (GOD & MONEY)

Last week I admitted that I am not all that fond of some of Jesus' teachings. The command to love our enemies is particularly hard for me. But if I claim to love Him, I must obey Him even if I don't necessarily want to. He said in **John 14** that if we love Him, we will obey Him. That includes the things that He tells us we must do as well as the things He tells us we are not to do.

One such teaching is found in **Luke 16:13-15**: Pay close attention. <sup>13</sup>**"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."** <sup>14</sup> **The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.** <sup>15</sup> **He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight."** This passage is sandwiched between the parable of a shrewd business manager and the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Both involve the snare that an inordinate desire for money can become.

In **Matthew 6** it is found in the midst of some other very pertinent information. <sup>19</sup> **"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.** <sup>20</sup> **But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.** <sup>21</sup> **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** <sup>22</sup> **The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.** <sup>23</sup> **But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!** <sup>24</sup> **No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."** And then, Jesus goes into great length to tell us not to worry, but to trust instead in God and His provision.

So, Jesus is pretty insistent that **we cannot love both God and money**. You may object that what He actually said was that we can't serve both God and money, and you'd be correct. Yet, contextually we're talking about the same thing. We cannot be devoted to money.

Maybe you would be one who would say this is not an issue for you. You know that the Apostle Paul says in **1st Timothy 6:10** that **"the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil."** You agree with the Beatles – because you *"don't care too much for money, 'cause money can't buy you love."* Of course they also had a song with the lyrics, *"Give me money, that's what I want."* Sounds like they couldn't make up their mind\_ and that's probably right on point. Most of us have divided hearts and minds about money. Here are a few questions for you to **give some serious thought** to...

Do you ever daydream about inheriting or winning or finding a lot of money? Have you ever entered Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes? More than once? Do you work to provide for your needs or to achieve or maintain a standard of living that is far above what you really need? Are you in deep debt because of selfish choices? Are you stressed out over our economy? Would you say that you don't fixate on money, but you do spend a lot of time looking with longing at things that you can't afford, but wish you could? Do you think that more money would solve all your problems? Do you spend more time in a given week maintaining your possessions than you do in strengthening your relationships with God and others?

If your answer to any of these was "yes", you may have a problem. I took a quiz last week on **Belief-net** about greed, and though my score indicated that I was *"more generous than greedy"*, the fact that I'm even a little greedy is a red flag\_ and an open door for a flood of issues.

On one occasion **Jesus warned** a guy who was quibbling over an inheritance, **“Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”** (Luke 12:15) We might think that unfair\_ that the guy only wanted his fair share. Where’s the harm in that? Yet, Jesus moved right into a parable about a man who foolishly built up his estate only to have his life prematurely ended, leaving all he’d worked and slaved for to someone else.

The **Hebrew writer** also cautions us, **“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’.**” (13:5) Listen to that language: *“Be on your guard”* and *“Keep free from...”* Seems to me, this danger of becoming possessed by what we possess is serious. **Why?** What’s the big deal?

We have a tendency to forget God is the one who gives us the ability to work and produce wealth (**Deuteronomy 8:18**). Instead of *“In God, we trust”* - we have our faith rooted in our bank account. We fail to acknowledge that He’s the one who provides opportunities; the One who blesses the work of our hands. As **Job (1:21)** recognized in his lifetime, God not only gives, He may also **“take away.”** Why? Maybe because we don’t appreciate what we have – or that we aren’t good stewards of it. Maybe because we have become too dependent on our money or our possessions. **Proverbs 22:7** says **“The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender.”**

Listen to Jesus in **Luke 6:38**. **“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”** God gives to givers, not hoarders. Yet, this passage has been used to perpetuate what is called the prosperity gospel. Give a little to God and get a lot from Him in return. It is even taught that God wants us all to be materially rich. If that were the case, the apostles missed it. They all died as paupers. God wants for His children to be rich in faith. He wants us to learn that if our focus is gaining material wealth, we may obtain it, but we will never truly be able to enjoy the fruit of our labors as God intended\_ and miss out on the real **security** God offers.

The proper perspective is this: We are not to serve money. It is to serve us as we serve God. We are not to love money, but love the One who provides what we need – and so much more. We are to love the Bless-er, not the blessing...and sometimes the only thing that reveals the truth about where our hearts rest is the lean times. Let me illustrate...

I love the things my wife does for me. I am so blessed. But a while back when she had both her knees replaced, I suddenly had to do the shopping, prepare the meals, wash the clothes, and tidy the house. Did I still love her? I love the way she holds me and I love the sweet things she says to me and about me. But what if, some tragedy left her without the ability to do that. Will I still love her? Would I still serve her? If not, it may not have been her I loved at all.

It is so easy to love, serve, and be devoted to wealth – money, possessions, and the empowerment that we expect them to bring. I personally believe that tithing is one of the ways God teaches us to keep things in check.. It moves us from trust in money to trust in God.

Here’s an exercise for you. Next time you feel compelled to spend money on yourself for something you don’t need, do this instead: **Give it away.** Give to the work of the church. Earmark it for Carpenter’s Place, Rock River Pantry, the Rescue Mission or one of our missions. Or- pray over it, then put it in your pocket to give to the 1<sup>st</sup> stranger who appears to be down on their luck. God will bless you for it. He’ll take care of your needs. More importantly, He’ll help you see money for what is intended.