

Text: Matthew 6:19-24

Title: Your Money or Your Life

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

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One time Jack Benny was robbed on the street the mugger said your money or your life...there was silence then the mugger said well what is it? Jack Benny said I'm thinking, I'm thinking

It's that time of the year again, the Stewardship campaign is underway...when most folks feel I've stopped preaching and started meddling. That which touches our wallets taps a very sensitive nerve. I've come to the conclusion that when someone says it's not the money it's the principle of the thing—it's the money. Voltaire said when it comes to money everyone is of the same religion.

There are few topics more offensive to the church member and threatening for the minister to talk about than tithing. With the exception of T.V. preachers most ministers do not talk about giving. They want to counter the negative opinion that all the church talks about is money.

But the minister does the people of God a great disservice by avoiding the topic. Jesus spoke about \$ & materialism more than any other single topic except the kingdom of God. Why this emphasis? Because the attitude we bring to our financial giving indicates of how serious we take the Lord in your life.

You might accuse me of being overly dramatic by making such an assertion, but the fact is \$ is one of the most important aspects of our lives. IT dictates the fulfillment of our basic needs—the food we eat, our mortgage payment. \$ determines what pleasures we have in this world: vacations, cars, dining. We derive our significance from \$ and use \$ as our safety net in times of crises. \$ is the perceived key to life's happiness and thus it becomes our #1 priority.

This is where God enters in. God doesn't want anything competing with Him as the most important thing in our lives. The Lord is our safety net & and is the source of our significance. This is the Lord's territory.

Let me clarify, first and foremost God wants your heart. Until you accepted His love and entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ don't worry about giving a thing. But once you enter into a relationship with God, our number one priority becomes pursuing God's will for our lives—His agenda becomes ours. 1 Cor. 8:6 We exist for Him.

Yet Christians are offended when pastors talk about money. Excuses and rationalizations abound...I'm in debt I've got bills to pay. I give to other charities. I tithe my time. I do the more important aspects of our faith like Pray and read the Bible. I don't believe in some of the churches ministries. God doesn't need my money. These are just some of the excuses.

As a result people drop a dollar or two into the plate. A dollar. You can't even buy a coke and a candy bar for a dollar. Far less support the building of God's kingdom. Once a dollar and a twenty dollar bill were talking: Where have you been the one dollar bill asked the twenty? The twenty said I've been to the bank the country club the theatre... where have you been one dollar bill? The Presbyterian Church, the Methodist church, the Lutheran church.

Ah, Pastor you are being insensitive to the people who can only afford to put a \$1 in the plate. If times are that tight God understands—relax.

Why is it we tend to be stingy when it comes to supporting Christ's church? I think a big reason has to do with not understanding how important our giving is to the heart of God.

Money has a way of blinding us. A wealthy merchant was a grouchy old scrooge with no friends. He went to the rabbi to talk about his empty life. The Rabbi had him look out the window and asked what he saw. I see men, women and children. Then the Rabbi led him to a mirror, now what do you see? I see myself. Then the rabbi said in the window there is glass and in the mirror there is glass. The only difference is the mirror is covered with silver and as soon as the silver is present we no longer see others, we only see ourselves.

Such is the affect money has on us. We hoard it and become obsessed with it. \$ separates friends and family...the stories I can tell you how inheritances destroy siblings is frightful.

Our \$ is important to God, not so much because of what good can be done with it, but more because of how money can negatively affect us. Remember the parable of the sheep and the goats...the difference between them was when did we see you hungry or hurting and not take care of your needs.

But let's face the facts, we live in a world where almighty dollar reigns & American's are seduced into pursuing the American dream.

How many times have you wished God would bless you with winning the lottery, or you inherited a large sum of money from your long lost relative? If only we could strike it rich then we'd prioritize giving to the church. I fear your present giving wouldn't change if you suddenly acquired a large sum of \$. The Lord says; Be faithful in little I will give you much.

However I think much is overrated. I read about a meeting that took place in 1923 with a group of business tycoons who controlled unthinkable sums of wealth. They had assembled to magnify their mutual success. The media trumpeted how these were the most enviable men on earth. In the years that followed this is what happened to the most enviable men on earth:

*Charles Schwab the president of the largest steel company lived on borrowed money the last five years of his life and died penniless.

*Richard Whitney, the president of the New York Stock exchange served time in prison.

*Albert Fall a member of the President's cabinet was pardoned so he could die at home instead of in prison.

*Jesse Livermore the greatest bear on Wall Street committed suicide.

*So did Leon Fraser the president of the bank of International Settlement.

*Ivan Kruegar head of the world's monopoly also committed suicide.

Hardly what I'd call enviable.

Maybe we need to stop and redefine success? Why were these wealthiest people on earth unhappy? Maybe it was their worries over their investments, dealing with lawsuits, worried about the stock market, concerned about losing their \$ which had become their security, their hope, their future, their sole focus. Which leads to the question where does your security lie? Your hope your focus If it is in God then it will demonstrated in what is most important in this world—how we handle finances.

We are inundated with a materialistic mindset. T.V Commercials, bill boards, radio, fashions everything moves us to be consumed with a acquisitions mindset. Now I need to state that \$ and stuff are not bad. Christians don't need to be the poorest people in town. The Bible tells us in Ps 37:4 He wants to give us the desires of our hearts.

But Christians need to guard themselves from following the world's way of thinking. We have a different set of values. Which impact the way we live and what we give ourselves to. Matthew 6:33 Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things (that we worry about) will be added unto you.

So the question becomes is the kingdom of God on your mind. An American Indian was in New York when amidst the noise and hustle and bustle of people scurrying everywhere, traffic squealing, taxis honking, sirens blaring, he says to his friend I hear a cricket. His friend says you're crazy. No I'm sure of it said the Indian and he attentively listen and track down the cricket in a cement planter.

His friend was astounded; my ears are not as keen as yours. No my ears are no different than yours said the Indian. It depends on what you are listening for. To illustrate his point the Indian reached into his pocket, pulled out a handful of change & tosses them into the street. Every head around them turned. Christian are you tuned to the almighty dollar or God's call?

Why does God make giving a law to be observed? Because when left to our own conscience the tithe isn't paid. All of us need encouragement when it comes to our giving. I remember filling out my pledge card one year and I asked my secretary for a calculator so I could figure out exactly how much I had to give God. She called me a cheap skate—make sure you don't give God a penny more. Our giving shouldn't be a legalistic duty, but a movement of gratitude from the heart. By the way God says test me and see if I won't out give you!

When I was worrying about selling the house my daughter was in a car driven by a 16 year old who hit the gravel too fast the car spun then flipped and rolled down an embankment stopping right in front of a pond. I wasn't worried about the money any longer. God protected her and I decided to trust Him with everything because He was obviously taking care of what mattered most to me. This year I will have no trouble filling out the pledge card because of my gratitude.

Besides as Nancy preached last week the stuff we have is from God anyway. And everything we have belongs to Him.

The things we hold on to so tightly are on loan to us to use for His purposes.

Our budget is all about building the kingdom of Love. 66% of young people polled didn't know if Moses or Jesus came first. In our brochure we have mentioned the desire to create space for our youth! Not to mention we don't have enough adult ed. space

I learned a lot about how God wants me to view my things I told the Thursday night group about a homeless man I used to regularly take care of. Once I was cleaning out my closet and thought I would be generous and give him my hand me downs. So the next time he knocked on my door I surprised him with a trash bag full of clothes and his face lit up Great I know some folks who could use these.

The question always comes down how much do I have to give. Jesus said if anyone wishes to come after Me let him deny himself pick up his cross and follow Me. We are called to bring a cross into our lives...not only into our theology but also into our relationships—forgiving others...bringing a cross into our economic life which means we prioritize promoting the gospel message Christ saves people free from their sin.

If we give money and it does not affect our life style—if there isn't a sacrifice-- if there is no cross in our economic life than...we have some growth to do.

Our giving habits are the key to whether you possess money or Money possesses you. Do you look for opportunities to invest in heaven? As Christians if we are not intentionally funding ministry than we have a materialism problem. That was the secret to the early churches success. We have an old letter from Diognetus who told us why the early church stunned people. He says "We share our table with all, but we do not share our bed with all." In other words pagans were promiscuous with their body, but stingy with their money. Christians are stingy with their bodies and promiscuous with their money so they could demonstrate the love of God.

For most Christians the tithe is the goal. The Bible asks for 10% and that's a good way to see if the gospel is working in your heart. When reflecting on what Christ has done and continues to do in your life and what He has planned for you 10% isn't much. If Jesus tithes His blood we'd still be lost. Jesus gave His all. Do you think God will not bless your 90%? But what about the economy? God says in Malachi Test Me...