

Christ Community Covenant Church
Money Matters and the Kingdom of God: *Zoe Basilikos!*
Pastor Dave Scherrer - February 7, 2016

I have sort of imagined that this next sermon series is an open letter to everyone 25 and younger. I long for young people to learn these important lessons we will be talking about as they start life's journey but I also hope that us older people can grow in strength and discipline in our study before it's too late, ***That lesson is that there is no positive correlation between having many things and being very happy.*** A life of simplicity, with a governor on your spending and a passion to advance the kingdom through giving, will be a far happier life than a life of luxury. I plead especially with teenagers and the young single people to learn these things early because statistics show that the young are less likely to give anything than the older, and the single are less likely to give anything than the married. In Christ you do not need to be old or married to be smart and Christ-like. I hope you will prove the pollsters wrong in your case. I wish that you could enjoy to the fullest ***Zoe Basilikos!***

Zoe Basilikos! - Living According to the Kingdom!

I wish that you could enjoy to the fullest ***life according to the Kingdom of God.*** I want you to experience not just a head-knowledge of what life in Christ *might mean* but a deep abiding, saturated, hilarious, free from fear, peace-dripping, power-flowing, love-crushing existence in the Spirit of Christ, heart, soul and mind and strength. So for the next month of Sundays I want to speak to what I believe is the greatest stumbling block for 21st century American Christians – that would be our finances and our attitudes and beliefs about money.

I am in good company here on this series on finances and kingdom living. Speaking pointed words about money and possessions puts me in good company with Jesus. Randy Alcorn reckons that "15 percent of everything Christ said relates to this topic – more than his teachings on heaven and hell combined" (*The Treasure Principle*, Multnomah, 2001, p. 8).

- "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Mark 10:21).
- "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven . . . Woe to you rich, for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6:20).
- "Whoever does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).
- "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25).
- "A person's life does not consist in the possessions that he has" (Luke 12:15).
- "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).
- "Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses in heaven" (Luke 12:33).
- "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head . . . Follow me" (Luke 9:58).

These are just a few Bible verse teasers. Money is such an important topic in the Bible that it is the main subject of nearly half of the parables Jesus told. One in every seven verses in the New Testament deals with this topic. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, fewer than 500 verses on faith, and more than 2,000 verses on money. Over and over Jesus is relentless in his radical call to a wartime lifestyle and a reckless liberality. Remember how excitedly he commented on the giving of the widow's mite? - "she put in all that she had." One time he refers to the Old Testament minimum of giving a tenth of your income, endorsing it, and then calling for a new way of looking at life and money far more radical than the mere tithe. "You tithe even your spices," he said to the Pharisees. "That's right. You should. But you have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23).

If we as a church – indeed if the entire Christian movement – were gripped by the radical life and open-handed generosity that Jesus taught, and if we tasted the freedom from fear and greed that Jesus bought with his life and light and love, I believe that there would be an avalanche of mercy and missions and financial means would be released among us!

A few facts: the average church donor in America contributed about \$700 annually to churches in 2010. That is about \$15 a week. Nearly one-quarter of all born-again Christians (23%) gave no money to a church in 2010. About 12% of born again Christians tithed their income to churches in 2010.

Now before you start getting wiggly, I believe that 4Cs is a generous church. We often give in an emergency to close a gap or to take care of a presenting need. I am thankful to be a part of this kind of other-minded church. Still, if my conservative calculations are correct, based on the number of people in our church and a conservative estimate of our financial position here based on Jefferson County records - if we all tithed (gave 10% of our gross income) we would more than double our income as a church immediately. If that were true and nothing on the expense side changed, we could pay off our entire church loan in two years instead of 20. Just saying. I believe that we are a generous church, but I also believe that we are not as financially disciplined as we could or should be.

And by far the biggest blessing for you and our church to be realized is not financial!!! I hope you believe me when I say that. Honestly, this sermon series is not about taking your money. The mere possibility that God might be pleased to release you to a long life of peaceful contentment and joy in Christ as well as an avalanche of mercy and missions and means for our church to advance the kingdom as an added benefit among us makes this series a joy for me to think about.

I believe that if you personally were set free to live simply and give hilariously the way the New Testament talks about giving, you would be the happiest people on earth. I say that in spite of suffering and the relentlessness of life. I say that because of countless testimonies (you can read some of them in Randy Alcorn's *The Treasure Principle*), and I say it because of what the Bible teaches. **Proverbs 14:21, "Happy is he who is gracious to the poor." Proverbs 22:9, "He who is generous will be blessed." 1 Timothy 6:9, "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."**

What I am saying is that Money Matters

Money Matters

This week, we will be simply laying a foundation. Kind of painting with a four inch brush. But over the next three weeks we will be biblically troubleshooting our finances, taking a look at our tithe and beyond and finishing with some helpful lifestyle choices in Christ that will move us toward greater contentedness and an ever increasingly simple life.

Let's look at some familiar passages together. I think you will see the *Zoe Basilikos* (life according to the Kingdom) embedded in these passages:

Luke 12:33-34

Sell that which you have, and give gifts to the needy. Make for yourselves purses which don't grow old, a treasure in the heavens that doesn't fail, where no thief approaches, neither moth destroys.³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

"Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal;²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal;

²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 12:15-21

He said to them, "Beware! Keep yourselves from covetousness, for a man's life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses."¹⁶ He spoke a parable to them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth abundantly.¹⁷ He reasoned within himself, saying, 'What will I do, because I don't have room to store my crops?'¹⁸ He said, 'This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns, and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'

¹⁹ I will tell my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry."²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You foolish one, tonight your soul is required of you. The things which you have prepared—whose will they be?'²¹ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Now just so that you know I still haven't lost my sense of perspective on all of this . . .

Ecclesiastes 10:19 (KJV)

¹⁹ A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.

The primary principle in all of this that will come up over and over is this idea seeking first the Kingdom of God and the instructions on how to actually do that – by laying aside treasures in Heaven so that our heavenly reward might be great. We really only have two options – to lay aside treasures on earth or to lay aside treasures in Heaven.

Laying aside treasure - In heaven or on earth

Again, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" is the large, overarching command – be passionate about experiencing the saving, purifying, empowering, love-producing rule and reign of God in your life. Your constant prayer is "Thy kingdom come!" – In my life, and over the nations. Then "Laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven" is a specific instance of what seeking God's kingdom involves.

Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness involves not trying to be rich on earth but trying to be rich in heaven, that is, rich in God. Seeking the kingdom means treasuring God and freeing yourself from the drag of earth.

To be fair, we all struggle to even marginally understand **the Kingdom of God** much less practically apply it on a daily basis. Daniel Bell wrote:

"Within the economy of salvation, the material goods with which God gifts us are given for the sake of meeting our needs -- our needs and the needs of our near and distant neighbors. Specifically, the purpose of material goods within the divine economy is that of nurturing communion. What God has given us is not intended solely for our private good."

~ Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World*

This topic is bigger than us. We will never come to terms with our finances simply as an act of our will or a hearty budget. The issues are deep seated in the DNA of humanity. The money addiction is much deeper than that, the lifestyle so much more insidious that this. It is spiritual warfare at its most critical level – a true battle of spiritual purposes. Martin Luther said:

"There are three conversions a person needs to experience: The conversion of the head, the conversion of the heart, and the conversion of the pocketbook."

~ Martin Luther

Understanding helps of course. Our main problem is that we tend to struggle to understand the broad and deep spiritual economics of heaven and the difference between ownership and stewardship.

Ownership and Stewardship in the Kingdom of God

As we have been saying, evidently there are two ways to live: you can live with a view to accumulating valuable things on earth, **owning them** - or you can live with a view to accumulating valuable things in heaven. That means that you live as simply a **steward of someone else's money** and resources' - in this case God's resources. Jesus says: the mark of a Christian is that his eyes are on heaven and he measures all his behavior by what effect it will have on heaven – everlasting joy with God.

And something else is clear: laying up treasures in heaven and laying up treasures on earth are not good bedfellows. **You have to choose between them.** You can't say, "Well how about both?" That's the point of **"No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money"** (Matthew 6:24).

There is something about God and money that makes them lean toward mastery. Either you are mastered by money and therefore ignore God (or make him a bellhop of sorts for your endeavors) or you are mastered by God and make money a servant of the kingdom. **But if either tries to master you while you are mastered by the other you will hate and despise it.** This is why Jesus said it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Very much money makes for a cruel master.

But let's be more specific. If Jesus means "devote your life to accumulating treasure in heaven" – which I take to mean increasing your joy in God in heaven – what is the main thing he has in mind that we should do now? My judgment from the context would be that it is **giving rather than accumulating.** If laying up treasures in heaven is the opposite of laying up treasures on earth, then probably laying up treasures in heaven will be NOT laying up treasures on earth but to instead pursue one of two spiritual options:

1. Become the expert steward so that everything you touch turns a spiritual profit, or
2. Give the things on earth away so that they do not become an anchor for you in your swim across the channel! Giving them away in ways that magnify the worth of Jesus.

The truth is we are never described as owners in the Bible – only as Stewards of our Master's resources. None of *this* (everything around us) is mine to possess. Things and money can possess me but I can never possess it. As Paul said:

1 Corinthians 4:2

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

I want to finish strong here as we approach the table: Loving money is suicide -

Loving money is suicide

Do you remember the conversation Jesus had with Judas when Mary lavishly anointed Jesus just 5 days before his death and Judas said "We could have sold that for a year's wages!" Jesus confronted him saying in essence "But Judas, I know you. You don't love the poor. And you don't love me. You love money. In five days you will sell me for 30 pieces of silver."

Listen, Judas. Listen, 4Cs. Listen, world. Listen to the apostle Paul.

1 Timothy 6:7-10

"We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith" — O, Judas! — "and pierced themselves with many pangs".

The love of money is suicidal. Jesus said it. Paul said it. Judas proved it. Dealing generously with our money is not the only, or even the main, way that Jesus calls us to lay up treasures in heaven. But it is one way. And I would like to ask you to pray and seek God's leading over the next three weeks as to how you might invest the money God has entrusted to you. How should you use it to lay up treasures in heaven?

As we move to the Lord's Supper, let this be in your mind: If there is any inclination in your heart to treasure Christ, and to love people, and to give for His sake, this is because Christ bought you with his blood and is working in you by His Spirit. And so it is fitting that we pause, even while we ponder the use of our money, and

remember the infinitely valuable body and blood of Jesus broken for us. We can ask the question “Is your treasure here at the Lord’s Table? Or is it in somewhere else? It is an important question because Jesus said:

Luke 12:34

³⁴ For where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

Prayer of Examination and the Table

Community Life Discussion Questions

Some have said that based on the number of verses dedicated to the topic of wealth and finances that the love of money is the number one stumbling block for Christians. What do you think about that possibility?

Some people get offended easily by teaching from the pulpit on matters of money. Does it irk you when someone teaches about money in church?

Someone read the following verses below:

Matthew 6:19-21

“Don’t lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don’t break through and steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 12:33-34

Sell that which you have, and give gifts to the needy. Make for yourselves purses which don’t grow old, a treasure in the heavens that doesn’t fail, where no thief approaches, neither moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

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He said to them, “Beware! Keep yourselves from covetousness, for a man’s life doesn’t consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses.” ¹⁶ He spoke a parable to them, saying, “The ground of a certain rich man brought forth abundantly. ¹⁷ He reasoned within himself, saying, ‘What will I do, because I don’t have room to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ He said, ‘This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns, and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ I will tell my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.’” ²⁰ “But God said to him, ‘You foolish one, tonight your soul is required of you. The things which you have prepared—whose will they be?’ ²¹ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

What does it mean to you to lay aside treasure in Heaven?

What does the verse “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” mean to you?

Dave on Sunday said that having a Kingdom Mindset frees us from the traps of jealousy, covertness and greed. Do you agree? What exactly is a Kingdom Mindset?

A few months ago Dave spoke an entire series on ‘Simplicity.’ How do you think that conversation speaks into the matters of money and the Kingdom of God?

What prayers would you like answered regarding your finances? How can we pray for each other in these matters? How can we help to encourage each other in these matters?