

**THE ULTIMATE GIFT**

**12<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

**HillSide's Minister – Rev' Allan Booth**

**WEEK 2 - MONEY**

Blurb:

*Who can resist the gift of money? On the other hand is money the root of evil? Should followers of Jesus avoid money matters? Join us this week as we “unwrap” another layer of the Ultimate Gift. What's in the centre will surprise you!*

**Acts 8:9-25 New International Version**

**Simon the Sorcerer**

<sup>9</sup> Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, <sup>10</sup> and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.” <sup>11</sup> They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. <sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. <sup>13</sup> Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

<sup>14</sup> When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. <sup>15</sup> When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup> because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

<sup>18</sup> When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money <sup>19</sup> and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>20</sup> Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup> You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup> Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”

<sup>24</sup> Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”

<sup>25</sup> After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

**Mark 12:41-44 New International Version**

**The Widow's Offering**

<sup>41</sup> Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. <sup>42</sup> But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

<sup>43</sup> Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. <sup>44</sup> They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

## Sermon

Today we remove the second wrapper of our big parcel, and here we find the gift of money. Who could refuse such a gift, everyone could do with a little more?! Yet very few really like to talk about it.

Straight up front let's get a myth out of the way. Money is not evil... it is neutral, neither good nor evil. All the fuss about money being the root of evil, is a misconception of the original teaching that we find in Paul's letter to Titus that *the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil*. In practical terms money is simply an agreed means of exchange within an agreed political area. If I were to offer 100 dollars over the counter as exchange for a burger at Wimpy; it would not be an acceptable transaction, as international as the dollar is it is valueless to someone who has no means of converting it to the local currency. However, when a large group of people all recognize a common trade value for a little orange piece of paper with R200 printed on it, that becomes exchangeable for goods or services.

Through the week I got to thinking if Jesus is even interested in how much money we have. After a while I concluded he wouldn't be. Surely he is far more interested in what we do with what we have been given? Look again at Mark, this is the point of what he is teaching his disciples in the temple court. Even though the amount offered by the widow was significantly less than that offered by various wealthy folk, she gave more. This makes perfect sense when we use John Wesley's thoughts as a guide. The real issue is 'not, how much of my money will I give to God, but, how much of God's money will I keep for myself?' The widow had clearly decided to give all of the money God had given her back.

From Acts we read about the first attempt to buy favour with God; Simon the sorcerer thought that the gifts of the Spirit could be purchased for a sum of money. Let's not be too quick to point out his foolishness, before we take a look at how many over time have done the same thing. There was a time when high church office was awarded, even purchased, to and by wealthy families. One of the core issues of the reformation was the buying of 'indulgences'. The practice was common to make hefty donations to the church, the local archbishop would then look the other way when you were caught committing a 'sin'. Long after the reformation this practice became popular within organized crime and developed into rampant corruption. Where the wealthy would be protected by the church and get away with literal murder, while the poor were prosecuted heavily for petty crimes. Sadly that behaviour is not too different from Simon the sorcerer wanting to buy baptism of the Spirit, the love of money has infected even the church at large.

Followers of Jesus must walk the line between the necessity of money and the priority of faith. In the context of Hillside, money is the means by which we can fund our mission; also it is necessary to retain staff, and our relationship with the larger Methodist Church. As a community faith guides us to a place of knowing we will be able to do all these things by the grace of God's provision.

How are we doing as individuals? This is where the pressure hits the pocket, so to speak, it is one thing to pronounce principles, another to apply them. Should every follower of Jesus be poor, giving away everything, and guarding against the accumulation of wealth? Not at all, just as some have been given the abilities to pray, or teach, some have been given the ability to grow financial resources. We can once again turn to Mr Wesley, who put this concept to the early Methodists.

Firstly gain all you can, then save all you can, then give all you can! Also he challenged them in this way: 'Do you not know that God entrusted you with that money (all above what buys necessities for your families) to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, to help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless; and, indeed, as far as it will go, to relieve the wants of humanity? How can you, how dare you, defraud the Lord by applying it to any other purpose?'

Those are strong words, they leave us with very little wiggle room... The gift of money is a neutral means of exchange, given to us to be used to provide whatever is necessary for our families, and then for the benefit of the community around us. The gift of money is a challenge in itself, but one question remains for us all to examine... how much of God's money do we use as he intended when he gave it to us?

May we be granted holy insight and discernment as we each answer that question.

Amen