

ICB; 22 November; Stewardship

A friend of mine went on a tour of Jerusalem. He saw lots of historic and religious sites. But one site he remembers more vividly than the rest.

At one point, the guide paused and pointed to an old brick wall in the narrow street ahead. "Here is one of the greatest miracles of all," the guide announced. "You pray at this spot, and money pours out of the wall. Many pilgrims come here to receive the benefits of its miraculous powers." [slide: Jerusalem wall]

As the group my friend was in drew closer to the wall, they realized the guide was pointing to ... ☺ an automatic teller machine [slide of an ATM]. ☺

 If you came today expecting the last sermon in a three part series about cooperation... I'm sorry. I didn't mean to mislead you. I was going to do that, but then felt this strong urge to do a "Stewardship" sermon this morning... ☺ which is just a euphemistic way to say – I'm going to talk about money. It's pledge month after all.

I will say this. I don't like to devote entire sermons to talking about money. It's something I'm reticent to teach about because (let's be honest) people hate it. ☺

What I want to suggest to you is that *how we use the money God has entrusted to us is an issue of worship*. Which is probably why many of us don't like to hear sermons about it --- because money for many of us IS... THE GREAT IDOL. It is THE thing which competes most strongly with God for our attention, our time and our worship.

 One person said that how we use Money – is really THE most reliable indicator of where our spiritual life is and where our priorities lie. (When I first heard that I resisted. But the more I think about it, the more I think it might be true.)

 So what does the Bible say about money?

First and perhaps most importantly, Scripture warns us against a desire to be rich. This might sound like crazy talk if you are new here. But stick with me for just a moment. There are lots of verses on this, but let me show you just one.

If you have a Bible, turn to 1 Timothy 6:9-10. It's on page 816 in the church Bibles. [read 1 Tim 6:9-10] *Those who want to get rich (or want the benefits of being rich) fall into temptation and a trap.* For me it's new technology.

Do you ever get a "new computer" bug? I do. I can be perfectly content until a friend shows up with the latest laptop. It's faster. Ha a better camera. Video editor. It doesn't really matter. I want it.

And once the trap is set – and I start entertaining the possibility of buying a new computer - I start seeing them EVERYWHERE. Even if in my MIND I know it's a stupid purchase. I don't need the same video editor that Steven Spielberg uses. I know that – but after entertaining the thought - it's like an *obsession*.

Can anyone relate? Perhaps for you it's not technology. Maybe for you it's a car. Or a home. Or a vacation. Or a dress. Or a pair of shoes.

Scripture says it's a trap. It's a temptation. It will plunge you into ruin and destruction. "But Pastor, is there anything wrong with a new TV? New apartment? Or 80,000 baht computer? No. It's not the THING. It's the obsession. There is nothing wrong with it unless you find yourself obsessed with it. Addicted to it. So if you can't relate to that – I guess you are off the hook. But if you can... well....

For the LOVE of money is the root of all kinds of evil... See, money itself is not evil. But the love of money... it's the obsession. It's the pursuit. The focus. Money (and the things it can buy) can be good or evil. It can be used to bless or curse. You can worship God with money or it can become a god that rules your life.

Paul said, [read 1 Timothy 6:10] [PAUSE]

Here's what I know. ***None of us believe that.***

Not whole-heartedly. If we did WE WOULD LIVE DIFFERENTLY.

Deep down, most of us think (I'm preaching to you as one guilty sometimes), *If I had 10%, 20% more income. I would have a better life. If I could pay that off or purchase that, I would be better. Life would be better.*

And here's the scary part: When we think that... the faith is in money, and not God. The security is in money and not God. And so the worship is of money, and not God.

It's NOT a sin to be rich, but it IS A SIN to DESIRE to be rich. (Do you see the difference?)

Here's another way to think about it... If your goal in life is to be rich, you WILL sin to get there. You'll run your company unethically. You'll be involved in shady business dealings. You'll become cheap or greedy. You'll not keep Sabbath. You'll work all the time. You'll neglect your family. Your friends. Your health. Your walk with God.

BECAUSE your goal will be to do what is most financially profitable... NOT what is most worshipful. This is an issue of worship. It's what Jesus meant when he said, ***No one can serve two masters.***

That's the first thing to know about the Bible's message about money. ***Don't desire to become rich... it'll consume you and lead you to ruin and destruction.***

Next - what do we do if we ARE ALREADY rich?

(Again) it is not a sin to be rich. Some people become rich because they work hard or they got lucky or whatever. It is not a sin to be rich – but there are additional obligations that come with being rich. So – the Bible says, don't make it your life goal to be rich, and if you are rich acknowledge that you have certain additional burdens and obligations because of your wealth.

In saying this – I feel confident in saying – most of us don't REALLY THINK we are rich. Rich is always the person who is a little bit higher than you. If you live in an apartment, they own a home. If you own a home, they own a bigger one, or a second one. It's always the other person. Let me be clear - by rich – I mean YOU and ME.

We live in a world where many of us spend way too much time at Paragon or Central or Emporium and we think these places are reality. If we spend too much time in these places and too much time watching TV – our minds get twisted and we find ourselves saying things like... *Hey, I don't have a 70,000 baht hand bag. ... I must be poor.* Nonsense. WE are rich. Here's what Paul says to the rich. 1 Timothy 6:17-19. **[read 1 Tim 6:17-19]**

Verse 17 says, *Therefore those of us who are rich should avoid the temptation to become arrogant.*

Because we are rich, it's easy to think we're better. That we deserve it. We deserve better treatment. We deserve better service. We just deserve better. Scripture says to avoid this attitude of entitlement.

Likewise – those who are rich (this is verse 18) should *do good and be generous.*

Simple put, we should share what we have. (This, of course, is the connection with stewardship.)

But I should point out, this sermon is not about fundraising. I am NOT preaching this sermon to try to raise budget for 2010. Yes, we need people to give financially for the church to thrive. No, we don't get funding from outside organizations. We are completely self-financed. But this sermon isn't motivated by that.

I expect without the sermon, ICB will remain in good financial shape. We have some very generous people around here...rich and poor. ☺

This isn't about fundraising. It is about STEWARDSHIP.

I want us to be liberated from the worship of money. It's not a sin to work hard, make a good living and be comfortable. It IS a sin to worship money. And sin destroys life.

I've seen people get divorced over money. I've seen people fight with their best friend over money. I've seen people sacrifice their dignity and self-respect for money. I've seen people do things they are soooo ashamed of ... for the love of money. Love for Jesus can save us from those things.

But I've also seen people choose money over Jesus.

I want us to be liberated from that. So we can be fully and rightly devoted to Jesus. So we can fully and rightly love our neighbors.

The pledge cards (and you can pull one out now if you'd like) **[slide]** in your bulletins are a tool to help you take a heart check and see where you are with this. View this as

an opportunity. Use the pledge cards to consider what your use of your wealth has to say about the condition of your heart. And make a course correction if you need to.

Let's pray. Amen.