

Sermon 031118 Money  
Scripture Matthew 26: 14-27  
Sermon Title- The Power of Money

I have someone in my life who I've known literally since he was a twinkle in his father's eye. He is a grown man, now. He has said that his goal is to be a millionaire by the time he is thirty. I'm not sure how old he is or how much money he has but he has done very well and his in his second successful business.

I saw him at a wedding a about a year ago and he was with his longtime girlfriend. I asked him if there were wedding plans in the making. He said, "Maybe, but if it happens, I'll get a prenuptial agreement." This saddened me. He's a good guy and a hard-working guy but money has become more important to him than human relationships.

We have been speaking about temptation during Lent and money is one of the great tempters in the world, maybe the greatest. In the movie Wall Street, Gordon Gekko played by Michael Douglas, gave a speech in which he delivered the now famous line, "Greed is good."

St. Paul wrote, "The love of money is the root of all evil." There is a good case for that. Money is the goal of crime, whether it be petty theft or white collar crime. People will go to extraordinary lengths to get it and to keep it and to get more of it.

The seduction of money goes beyond the desire to live in a comfortable home and driving a reliable vehicle. Society has turned money into a definition of success. It was Eartha Kitt who said, “I’ve been rich and I’ve been poor. Rich is better.”

There was a French 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher named Jean Jacques Rousseau who expounded on a theory he called ‘Natural Man.’ He asserted that civilization and the acquiring of property and money make one unhappy.

He compared an urban European to an American native American. He said that an Indian would never walk past someone who is in tough shape where it happened every day in Paris. He pointed out that when there was a successful hunt, the entire tribe partook of the meat even those who did not participate. The lack of possessions make for a harmonious life. He contrasted that to a so-called more developed society. Here’s a passage that Rousseau wrote.

The first man who, having fenced in a piece of land, said ‘This is mine’, and found people naïve enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: Beware of listening to

this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.

Rousseau had a valid point but we know that civilized people would never go back to primitive lifestyles. He knew that that genie was out of the bottle.

Money ruined the life of a Bible character named Judas Iscariot. He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus knew about that and called Judas out at the last supper. It was later in Gethsemane that Judas delivered the kiss of death when Jesus was arrested.

When Judas had a bout of conscience, he returned the money and committed suicide by hanging. Judas qualifies as a life ruined by the temptation of money.

Now, let me be clear. Money in and of itself is not evil. I've been speaking of what money can do to someone when it becomes a primary driver of behavior. Money can be a positive force in the world. It can be a driver of hard work and achievement. Money can be used as a positive force for good. Money is needed for good schools, hospitals, and important social services. Money is needed to support those who serve, protect, and defend. Your money keeps this church going along with the food pantry downstairs.

Let me hit pause here for a moment for a public service announcement. Recent changes in the tax laws may well affect your ability to claim deductions for contributions to the church and other

charities. It is important to remember that tax deductions are not a reason for charitable giving. By giving to the church and other charities, you get to see your money at work in your community, you feel better, and you help people who need it more than you, which is what Jesus calls us to do.

So, how do we use money in healthy and positive ways instead of obsessing about it? Our best move is to see what Jesus had to say about money. As it turns out, Jesus had a great deal to say about money. Jesus talked both negatively and positively about money. In the interest of time, I will not sight chapter and verse here. If you'd like, I can provide that for you.

Let's start with the negatives that Jesus taught about money. Jesus taught that we should not depend upon our resources but upon God. Jesus taught that since we are mere stewards, we should invest ourselves in the lives of others and not hoard our resources for ourselves. Jesus taught that we should not use the power of money to lord over others, either through arrogance or coercive manipulation.

Now let's look at where Jesus is affirmative when it comes to money. Jesus taught that a legitimate use of money is to support religious institutions. Jesus taught that we should pay taxes. Jesus taught that we should use our financial resources to help the poor and needy. Jesus taught that we should use our financial resources to support and care for our families. Jesus taught that we should exercise

careful money management and shrewd wisdom prior to making a purchase. Jesus taught through the examples of stewards and farmers that it is appropriate, even expected by the Lord, that we should invest in long term gain and financial stability.

He talked about money in many parables, but frankly, often the lessons were not about money per se but on using your talents and time properly.

It always strikes me as amazing how easy Jesus makes preaching. If we follow the lessons of Jesus, we'll get this life right. If we do not hoard our money, or use it to lord over others, and we do not depend on our resources but on God, we will be living by his word. If we use our resources for our families, our church, and to help those in need, and pay our taxes, we are living by his word.

Will you pray with me? Gracious and loving God, guide us this day and all our days. Make us the good stewards that you call us to be. Help us to say no to the seductions of money and help us to use our resources to do your work. AMEN