

# Money Matters Week 5 - 26 July 2009

Practical Money issues – What have we learnt? Where do we go from here?

## **What we considered in Week 5**

Week 5 was a chance to reflect on what we have covered in Money Matters and a chance to reflect on where we go from here.

For me there has been much to learn. I have been reminded of just how radical the words of Jesus about money and possessions really are. It seems that Jesus had little time for the rich. That poses big questions for all of us who are wealthy compared to most people in the world.

I have also been reminded that in the Old Testament Law (that Jesus came to fulfil) there is a set of values that is very different to the ways that our world expects us to handle money and possessions. Kim Tan's book Jubilee Gospel has been particularly helpful to me. As such the Christian agenda is not meant to be slightly different to what we see around us but to encompass a fundamentally changed set of values.

We have seen that money is simply a commodity that can be used for good or bad. I have been made to think about how I use money for the good of others. Money can give us such positive opportunities. The challenge is can we be as generous to others as God has been to us?

In the example of Nehemiah I have seen a role model of how I should aspire to be engaged in the world around me. I long for his integrity and sense of urgency and social engagement. His life was underpinned by a commitment to pray in all situations and circumstances demonstrating a genuine passion for God's ways.

We have also seen that there is a need for a Christian voice over so many things that are wrong in our world's attitudes to money and possessions. We need more than just 'sticking plaster' but to aim to be agents of lasting change – to rediscover a prophetic voice that speaks to our society. But are we involved enough with our society to make that possible?

But combined with all of this I have felt that the most important point of all is that we have discovered that there are so many practical things that we can do to handle money more effectively – both individually and as part of a church community.

## **A thought about money and possessions from the words of Jesus**

The American Tony Compollo has claimed that he is now a 'red letter' Christian. He is referring to those versions of the Bible that highlight Jesus' words in red. He says, "In adopting this name, we are saying that we are committed to living out the things that Jesus said. Of course, the message in those red-lettered verses is radical, to say the least. If you don't believe me, read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). In those red letters, He calls us away from the consumerist values that dominate contemporary American consciousness. .... Most important, if we take Jesus seriously, we will realize that meeting the needs of the poor is a primary responsibility for His followers. Figuring out just how to relate those radical red letters in the Bible to the complex issues in the modern world will be difficult, but that's what we'll try to do. Gandhi once said that everybody in the world knows what Jesus was teaching in those verses--except Christians! We will try to prove him wrong." As we have seen none of those red letters is more

radical than with respect to our money and possessions. In this part of our lives let's resolve that we will join Tony Compello in trying to prove Gandhi wrong!

## **An example from the life of Nehemiah**

Very often we feel inadequate to make a difference for God. If only we knew the 'mind of God' better it would be so much different. This seems to make sense. So perhaps we hold back until we get our theology sorted out – until we are more sure of our facts? But I am surprised to find that it was not like that when I see the example of Nehemiah. The Jews rediscovered the full impact of the law and its requirements only **after** they had rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem not **before**. In one sense God sorted them out after they had fulfilled their mission! We would have expected it to be the other way around? So perhaps this says to us act in faith, do what you sense is right even if you haven't worked things out to the 'nth' degree or are perfectly prepared. Then as we act we may find that in 'doing' we come to understand God's ways better and that then the theology somehow clicks more completely into place? Is this the way of faith - the spiritual reward of being and acting rather than just continuing as a spectator on the sidelines? Let's resolve to get stuck in like Nehemiah was and be tuned into the needs of our post "Credit Crunch" world.

## **A prayer for the week**

LORD you are our amazing God. Thank you for all that we have learnt over the last few weeks about money issues. May those lessons become real in our lives so that our faith may be more of a 'way of life' and not just a 'system of belief'.

## **The Money Matters finance tip**

Nine out of ten families with children are entitled to tax credits. They are means tested but are available to many people. What is not widely appreciated is that if a person claiming tax credits also makes Gift Aid payments then the real cost of making the gift can be very low. The organisation 'TaxAid' give an example where the eventual cost to a person making a payment under Gift Aid, worth £128 to a charity, is only just over £50. That is quite a return! (See [http://www.taxaid.org.uk/uploadedfiles/document/1\\_261\\_Tax\\_Credits\\_and\\_GiftAid\\_v1.pdf](http://www.taxaid.org.uk/uploadedfiles/document/1_261_Tax_Credits_and_GiftAid_v1.pdf) for further details)

This can be very relevant in giving to a Church. As a result, it is important to take part in the Gift Aid scheme by signing a Gift Aid declaration. You benefit as well as the charity. If you need more information about this the Mutley Money Advice Project will be happy to help you.

## **A Money Matters Question**

One question that we asked was how does a Christian speak to a non Christian about money? Perhaps this is best thought about at the end of our series. There will often be many things that we will share in common with those that do not share our faith. Good financial disciplines will be similar. But there are differences as well. A Christian should act as if his or her money is simply being held for another and we are told to trust God for our needs not our bank balance. So perhaps we should focus on those things that we share that are the same knowing that our use of money can be very different.