

Money Myths 1. Only people with money should give

2 Corinthians 8:1-7 & Mark 12:41-44

During the Nazi occupation of his country in the Second World War, King Christian X of Denmark noticed a Nazi flag flying over a Danish public building. He immediately called the German commandant, demanding that the flag be taken down at once. The commandant refused. "Then a soldier will go and take it down." said the king. "He will be shot," threatened the commandant. "I think not," replied the king, "for I shall be the soldier." Within minutes the flag was taken down.¹ Such was the King's belief in freedom that he could not keep it private but sought to publicly demonstrate it. No Christian should ever maintain that his or her beliefs are private. How can beliefs that shape a life be hidden away from view? That understanding underpins the issue of stewardship.

¹ Today in the Word, MBI, August, 1991, p. 13.

Stewardship, good or bad, emerges from what we believe. So what does the word “stewardship” mean to you? If I were to go around the church and listen to your answers to that question, I’m sure one word more than any other would come up: the word “money”.

Stewardship is about an awful lot more than money. It is about our entire response to the grace of God yet very often we associate money with stewardship. As a Church of Scotland congregation we are committed to profiling stewardship issues every year. That’s a requirement sent down from the General Assembly and this year we are focussing on money in particular. Yet the very mention of the word “money” in church leaves us feeling somewhat uncomfortable. Money, and in particular the money we offer to God on a Sunday, is a private matter. We do not relish sermons that challenge us on this subject. And ministers don’t feel comfortable

preaching about it either. But as with everything in our lives, it's not a matter of whether we feel comfortable, but whether it needs to be done, and it's clear from our Scripture readings that it's an important matter that needs to be addressed.

I have chosen 2 Corinthians 8 as our text for the next three Sundays. In this passage the apostle Paul writes about our stewardship. His emphasis is not on our giving by guilt - because we have to. Nor is his emphasis on giving with a grudge - because we ought to. But his emphasis is upon giving with grace - because we want to.

He even begins with grace in the first verse of 2 Corinthians 8. The Corinthian church was not giving to God's work. And it is a particular feature of the church that when we are not grounded in spiritual realities we are generally not generous. Paul encouraged them by

using the Macedonians as an example. The Macedonians had suffered greatly for the faith, and yet they gave so sacrificially for God's work. They excelled in what Paul called "the grace of giving" (2 Cor. 8:7).

As Paul wrote these words, the Jerusalem church was being scattered throughout the world. There was a depressed economy. However, the Greeks in Corinth were doing well financially. But they were not giving to God's work as they should. Thus, the apostle drew their attention to the Philippians, the Bereans, and the Thessalonians as examples to them. Little did those Macedonian peoples know that when they gave what they did, they would influence us 2,000 years later. But they have, for their faithfulness has been recorded forever.

I would like to approach the issue of Christian giving from a set of negatives that I would like to try and

dispel. These negatives, or money myths, we could call them, were problems for the Corinthian church and they are just as problematic today. The Corinthians were living with these myths and seeking to justify their lack of giving to God's work because of them. In so many ways the church of the Western world today is living with these same money myths. I want to deal with one myth at a time over the next three Sundays. Myth number one: some people say only people with money should give. Let Bob or Bill do it. They have the money. We often exclaim, "If I had their money, I would give." This notion that only people with money should give is just a myth, though.

Paul said that these Macedonian people gave out of "a great trial and out of deep poverty." They gave out of what? Stock reserves? Certificates of deposit? Savings? No, out of "deep poverty" and "great trial." The Greek

word translated "trial" in 2 Corinthians 8:2 is the same word that means "purging." The word picture might be like that of a precious metal that is heated until the liquid impurities rise to the top and are scraped off. Pure metal is left, and when it is cool it's stronger than ever. Here were people who were being tested. The heat was being turned up on them. Yet out of this great trial, they gave to the Lord's work.

The apostle also says that they gave out of "deep poverty." They had lost their jobs. But circumstances did not keep them from giving. The people in Macedonia did not buy into the myth that those in Corinth did, that only people with money should give.

Our Lord Jesus destroyed this myth when he told the story of the widow with her last coins. We all know the story well. A lot of people would counsel her to keep it. They would tell her that only people with money should

give. And they would have robbed her of a great blessing and us of a great example. Jesus commended the widow, not because of what she gave, but rather how she gave. She gave out of her want and not out of her resources.

C.S. Lewis once wisely wrote; “I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.” Furthermore addressing the big issue of motivation Mother Theresa of Calcutta was quoted as saying: “If you give what you do not need, it isn't giving.” Giving needs to be sacrificial. That's the nature of it and so we should expect no easy answers from God if we complain to him that we don't have enough in order to give. Such a complaint would make no sense to Jesus because he told a story about a woman who had so little but gave so much. It is a myth that says that only

people with money should give. The greatest givers are most often those with little. This is because it is not what we give but how we give that matters most to Christ. Look at the Macedonians. What an example they are to us today. They gave out of "great trial and deep poverty." Let us learn to do likewise.