

SHOW ME THE MONEY

Matthew 22:15-22

Well, we've reached another mile-marker on our Lenten “Journey to Hope.” We've past other mile markers in the Lenten sermon series dealing with such things as relationships, work, refueling, temptation, and self-esteem. But today we must deal with something that's absolutely necessary for any kind of journey—**MONEY.**

They say there are only two things certain in life—DEATH AND TAXES. But there's another I would suggest to you today—FREEDOM TO MANAGE YOUR MONEY. It's interesting to me that those who don't have a lot of money seem to be willing to share it, and those with a lot are always afraid of losing what they have. Today's mile-marker will hopefully help us put money in its proper perspective so that it doesn't become a stumbling block or pot hole on our “Journey to Hope.”

Here's a bit of American History trivia for you. When was the first national coin minted in the US, authorized by the Continental Congress? (1776—picture). It was a pewter dollar coin inscribed with the word *fugio* meaning “I Fly”. It also has a sundial on it, saying “Time Flies,” along with an odd phrase, “Mind your business.” Was this sage advice to a colonial business man or something added by a disgruntled mint worker? We're not sure. But this one dollar coin is worth \$1,500 today.

Now look at one of today's coins. You'll find the words, "E Pluribus Unum" meaning "From many, one." Sounds good since it was meant as a sign of unity in the 50 states. But the truth of the matter is, our founding fathers plagiarized these words from a British book called, *Gentleman's Magazine*. This would be the equivalent to finding a national slogan from "GQ" magazine today.

There's a credit card commercial with the slogan, "What's in your wallet?" Today, maybe we need to ask a similar question: "*What's your money saying to you?*" "Mind your business" or "I Fly" or "In God We Trust"? The coin Jesus uses today says, "*Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but give to God what belongs to God.*" Today I'm going to try and unpack what's behind Jesus' words and try to help us gain a better perspective (a Christian perspective) on the issue of money.

Matthew tells us that some disciples of the Pharisees and King Herod are trying to set a trap for Jesus to get him in trouble with the Romans. They begin with some flattery, showering him with kind words. They say, "*Teacher, we know you have integrity, teach the ways of God accurately, are indifferent to public opinion and don't pander to your students.*" Sounds good. but whatever they're selling, Jesus aint buying it! He knows what they're up to. They ask, "*So tell us honestly: Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?*" Talk about a loaded question! That would be like asking someone, "Do you still beat your wife?"

The trap is set and Jesus is going to have to be very careful here how he answers. He knows that they're asking about a particular tax that can only be paid with a Roman coin. Problem is, the coin has an engraved

image of Caesar on it—one that no self-respecting Jew would be caught dead with. That would be blasphemy. So if Jesus says, “Yes, it’s lawful” he would alienates the entire Jewish nation, his own people, and lose credibility. But if he says “No,” he could be arrested by the Romans for tax evasion. It’s a dilemma to say the least, truly “lose-lose” situation.

But Jesus is no dummy. He sees a way out of their trap. He asks one of the Pharisees for a coin, which they give him. (*Now, what’s an upstanding, law abiding Pharisee doing with a Roman coin in his pocket?*) But that’s not the point here. Jesus asks them, “*Whose picture is on this coin?*” Of course, they reply, “Caesars.” And then they wonder what he’s up to.

Then Jesus slips right out of their trap, like a mouse grabbing a piece of cheese from a mousetrap without getting caught. He says to the, “*Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but give to God what belongs to God.*” In other words, Jesus is saying, without a yes or no answer, that what really belongs to the emperor should be given to him. He in essence gives them an indirect YES implying that paying taxes isn’t against Jewish law. But then he goes one step further. He says to also give to God what must be given to God. You see, loyalty and faithfulness to God is on a higher level of importance than simple loyalty to some earthly emperor. The Pharisees and Herodians are speechless, and they walk away.

We all know that money is important and that we need money to survive in this world--to live and function. It was important in Jesus day also. His teaching and speaking on money, wealth, and riches was second only

to his teaching on the KOG.

Jesus taught that money was a means to an end, and not an end in itself. It's to be used to pay our taxes, yes, but also to do God's work in the world. Money shouldn't be socked away like a Continental Dollar for 232 years for it to grow in value to \$1,500! First of all, you're going to die before it reaches that kind of maturity and value! Remember, there are no luggage racks on hearses!! Nor U Haul trailers! You can't take it with you!

On our "Journey to Hope," we're reminded today that, yes, we must render unto Caesar, pay our taxes, BUT also to give to the work in the world for the Kingdom of God for the transformation of the world. If you listen to your money, it's NOT saying, "E Pluribus Unum" but its saying , "Use me!"

As God's people, as disciples of Christ, we're called to be good stewards of all the wonderful resources we've been given to advance the work of God in the world. All we have belongs to God. It's NOT ours. Whatever we have has been given by the grace of God and we've been called to care for it as long as we walk this earth. God allows us to enjoy it, relish it, invest it, and manage it for a season, but then we're to let go of it. So why not let go of it in a way that blesses others?

Jesus is saying today, "Pay your taxes, but remember that God's also given us the freedom to manage it so that we can be generous givers with the money we have. (tax deductible donations!)

So “What's in your wallet?” What has God blessed you with? And how are you going to use it? People give generously if there's an important cause or mission at work, like our building program here at Bethel. (By the way, did you know that we have given at least 10% of our annual budget, \$50,000, to missions and aid to others in 2009? That's on top of what you gave to the Capital Campaign!) This means that you believe in the ministry and mission of Bethel Church and our UM connection! Well done!

You see, people give when they see their dollars making a difference—like building projects. You see a result; or to fellowship activities that bring people together; or help make our worship services more inspiring and uplifting. But it's not quite as easy to see the difference it makes when we give to mission projects like UMCOR that feed the hungry both here at home and abroad or to Christian education programs that help shape the hearts and minds of children and adults. All these things require a trust in God and our generous giving to enable the advance of God's interests in the world.

Jesus said, “Show me the money!” Ok. Let's do that. Show ME your money, right now! Take out a coin or dollar bill from your pocket. Now look at it. It doesn't say, “Tiberius Caesar, son of Divine Augustus” on it does it? No. It says things like “In God We Trust” and “Liberty.”

“In God We Trust.” That's not just a slogan, but a challenge—a challenge for us to fully rely on our good and gracious God; a challenge to believe that God will take care of us in the future just as he has in the past. And “Liberty” reminds us that we are a free people—free to be generous in our giving as faithful stewards out

of the abundance God has blessed us with.

So I ask you: ***Are you putting YOUR trust in this loving, caring, generous, gracious God through his Son, Jesus Christ? Are you trusting in the Lord, and leaning on your own understanding? And are you giving as you know you should to help make a difference in our world?***

May we all truly believe that God has blessed us to be a blessing to others, to help us do God's work in the world. Amen.