

Adult sermon notes

Exodus 12:29-39

It may be helpful to begin with the story of John Newton, author of 'Amazing Grace'. More details can easily be found on the web. John was a slave trader gloriously converted to faith in Christ. The lesser-known fact is that he continued slave trading after his conversion to Christianity. It was only much later in life that he realized how wrong he had been to make money out of the misery of other human beings. John Newton's story reminds us that God's work in us is not finished when we become Christians! Allowing the gospel to touch our money is perhaps the biggest step to take. Martin Luther is reported to have said that we require three conversions: of the heart to Christ; of the head to think like Christ – and of the wallet! If our conversion does not touch the wallet it is unlikely to have been effective in the head or the heart.

Money has a peculiar power to resist the claims of the gospel on our lives. Surely that is why Jesus told so many stories about money and had so much to say on the subject. When we become Christians not every besetting sin is immediately repented of, every attitude changed. Not every gift that God gives is used as it God intended. In financial discipleship we have to learn to think about money clearly and carefully and act afresh in all kinds of situations. What can we learn from this passage?

Thinking clearly about money

First, we said last week that money is part of the promise and the blessing God gives his people. The [Exodus Introduction](#) explores the significance of these gifts in the Exodus story in a little more detail. Christians are not invited to renounce *wealth* which is part of the goodness of God's creation, but to renounce *self* – the sinful desire to put ourselves at the centre and to accumulate all we can. There can be no room in Christian thinking about wealth, possessions and our Christian giving for words like embarrassment, guilt, meanness or fear. Possessions are part of the provision of God, but because of sin we do not pretend that this fullness is always and everywhere equally distributed because of human sin.

Thinking as free people

The 'prosperity gospel' talks about God's material blessings in a way that is unconnected to the issues of poverty, injustice and biblical lifestyle. Isn't this a sign that we are thinking about God's blessings in worldly way? The gift is good but our hearts and attitudes

are wrong. We constantly turn gifts into possessions. As we will see in the next few weeks Israel could choose equally for the gifts to be melted down into a golden calf or brought as gifts to adorn the Tent of God.

Think for a moment about your early memories or experiences of money. This early thinking often shapes or lives powerfully. (See the [Money Autobiography](#) web page for a personal story as illustration). Israel had spent their entire lives in slavery watching the wealth and power of Egypt. It is fair to ask what other way of thinking about wealth and possessions did they have than the power and wealth of a nation that they could never have? When they received these gifts beyond their dreams, how did they know how to handle the blessing correctly? They were set free, but their desires were shaped by their awareness of the difference between their poverty and the Egyptians' wealth, created off the back of their slavery. When we become Christians our thinking and attitudes about money need to be brought into obedience to God. We learn much from the world that shapes our thinking and actions. There is no tougher lesson to learn than to handle money in a new and godly manner.

Baggage on the journey

But learn it we must! If you are on a journey there is some 'baggage' that you cannot afford to take with you because it slows you down. It was Pharaoh's fear of losing wealth and power that led him to enslave the people of Israel. It was arguably the Israelites formative experiences of poverty and watching the wealth of Egypt that made it hard for them to trust the provision of God in the wilderness through the gift of manna. We will look at this next week and after that the idolatry of the golden calf in Moses absence. Sometimes, as individuals or churches, we hold too tightly to the God's gift of money. By not giving or sharing we turn God's gift into a possession. Both the gift and the heart of the person receiving the gift are hardened and distorted. Our possessions cannot ultimately satisfy; only a relationship with God can do that.

But when we handle the blessing of money as free men and women there is joy and freedom and generosity. Paul teaches the Corinthian church (2 Corinthians 9: 6-8) that their sharing of financial support for Jerusalem will produce an abundance of spiritual blessing in return. Blessing, freedom and joy come from serving God not money.