

Found Faithful
Pastor Jeff Wood

I think that it is worth pondering certain things at set intervals. Christmas and incarnation, Easter and resurrection, New Year's and goals and growing, then even matters like managing anger and depression. It is good to get dressed up on your anniversary and go out and talk about being married. It is good to take inventory in the warehouse. You can't do it every day but you should regularly. It is good to be healthy day in and day out but it is also important to go for a physical. Same rule operates with respect to our commitment to Christ and how that commitment works in relation to money.

We at First are at that interval point and I want to talk with you about what God says about the money. The umbrella verse for us in these weeks is I Corinthians 4:2, *"It is required of a steward to be found faithful."*

Pray.

Princeton University professor, Robert Wuthnow, in his book *God and Mammon in America* notes that we in the USA are generally disinclined to speak openly and personally with others about money. We want more money. Things to buy are all around us. But talking openly and personally with others about it in our lives, we don't do much. Sure we say how much that fender bender set us back but we would probably gladly reveal how many times we go to the bathroom at night before we would say

among friends how much our annual income is. That's how taboo money is in terms of personal conversation.

Wuthnow notes there is one group of people in American life which are *more* disinclined to speak about money than the general population. We're all disinclined in America but some are more so. Guess who? Church attenders. We voice how our property tax bill went up while standing at the coffee counter. But we do not say in a prayer meeting that we have credit card debt of \$25,000. Ask prayer for a relative's cancer but for our financial temptations or problems? Unlikely.

This is fascinating in that the one we church attenders call Lord and Savior spoke about money only second to the kingdom of God. He was open about it. Yet the followers, who are to be imitators of him, are, according to Wuthnow, not open. Jesus wanted us to be free with respect to it and yet apparently we are nervous with respect to it. And the Bible which is our foundation, has in it verses on faith that count up to be about 500. Verses that bring up prayer amount to a little more than 500. Verses that bring up money amount to 2,350! How odd that Jesus and the Bible speaks so much and so openly about money and yet we do so little.

What do you say we here go in the other direction? Let's talk about it and what it means to be found faithful with respect to money. It means three things. A found faithful servant understands All, the All But, and All With Ten.

A found faithful servant understands the word,
All.

Someone once said that if the church gets around to speaking about money, we talk about ten percent, ten percent, ten percent – a tithe. We might fairly ask about the other 90%? What about that percent? Well, let's talk today about the whole 100% because when it comes to us being stewards found faithful that means we understand not just a tenth but the 100%.

Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is Lord's and the fullness thereof." That means everything on this globe is his and if you are on it, and I hope you are, that means you too.

A little boy made a sailboat. He was painstaking about it. He glued it just right. He sanded it just so. He painted it exquisitely. It took him weeks. He finally got to go to the park and sail it in the little river and pond there. All was going delightfully fine until a big burst of wind carried the sailboat to the other side. A culvert was there and, all of sudden, down went the boat. The little boy couldn't get there directly and it took him some time. By the time he did get there it was gone.

A few weeks later he was walking down the main street in his town when he saw his boat in a store window. It was unmistakably his. He went in and said so. But the store owner said, "Not according to the guy who sold it to me." If the boy wanted it, he had to come up with the money for it.

For the balance of the summer he mowed every yard he could find and did every chore he could get paid for. Finally, he had enough and went to the

shop. He put the money on the counter and got in return the boat. As he stepped outside into the sunlight he was heard to say, "You are twice mine – I made you and I bought you."

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the truth. God made you and me. And God bought you and me. We had indentured ourselves to the point of no return. We had indebted ourselves to the point of no return and there was no Chapter 9 protection. Then God paid our debt in full. We had been in bondage to an evil master and Jesus bought us from him. So we are his. We were made by him and bought by him.

A steward found faithful gets this ... all one time, all a second time. Made, redeemed.

Someone said, "Sow me a self-made man and I'll show you a man without a belly button." A strange prophet challenged God to a creating contest and God let him start. When the prophet reached for dirt to begin fashioning something, God said, "Get your own dirt." We did not make ourselves. We do simply and completely sustain ourselves. We do not redeem ourselves.

Everything you and I have is made by God – our bodies, our intelligence, the ground we stand on, the friends we have, the things we make a cake with ... everything ... all made by God. 100% ... of all you are and have.

A steward found faithful understands All But. Yes, God made and redeemed it all but there is one thing that doesn't belong to God and that is our free will. He's given us a say. That's what love does. That

what he does, wanting a real relationship and not a robotic one.

He realizes this -- "All you give me is regifting. I give it to you. You give mine back to me." But your own will is yours to give. If Adam and Eve picked fruit from the garden and gave it to God, they'd be regifting. But when God asked them not to pick from one tree, they had their own will that they could make a gift to God *by doing what he asked*. They didn't but they could have and that listening to him and doing what he said was uniquely *theirs* to give.

If God gives you ten trees with dollars on them, you regift to him but when he says there is one in the ten that belongs to him, and you take your will and honor what he says, you are giving him your own gift, the one that has to do with your very own will.

God is so good that he even figures out a way to have that which is truly your own so that YOU in your freedom and will can know what it is to give ... not someone else's stuff but your own. A steward found faithful understands his or her freedom...God's given all *but* there's yours and mine to give.

Now speaking of one in ten we have gotten to the tithe. A steward found faithful understands all, all but, and the tenth of all.

Ten percent. That's what the word tithe means – a tenth. It's in the Bible. And, moreover, it's in the New Testament. Some people think that when the New came, all the old was dismantled. No. Listen to Jesus, "You tithe down to mint and cumin and this you ought to have done without neglecting the other weighty matters of the law." Jesus says it ought to be

done. Not in exchange for something else but with the something else.

Add to this that Jesus intensified the Old Testament – not just murder but hate is wrong, not just adultery but lust. Going in that direction why would he not take 10% and say, “10% yes but the truth beyond it is 100%”?

And in the Bible the tithe is given to God with four criteria applied.¹ First, it is given at the first. Proverbs 3:9 literally says, “Honor God by giving him the first part.” II Corinthians 16:20 says that every person is set aside a sum of money on the first day of every week for the offering to the Lord.” The first day is the day when sin and death were thrown off and Jesus rose and so on the first day throw off the shackles of mammon and live in God’s liberty. It’s the first check we write and not the last. As someone said, “Give God what’s right not what’s left.”

Second, it is not to be a second as in first-rate, second-rate. It is not only to be at the first but it is to be from the best. In Malachi 1 God confronts those who have been offering crummy sacrifices. He says, “When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you?” (1:8) What he’s saying is like how in stores there are firsts and seconds. You get the seconds, the ones with stitching flaws, at really discounted prices. The boss who, after you had been unemployed for two years, gave you a

¹ So let’s not quibble a lot but giving to God primarily means the church and Christian mission. That’s different than the Police Federation with a sticker for your car or the Republican or Democratic Party.

job, the boss to whom you owe so much, ... would you give him a flawed shirt for Christmas? Probably not. Then don't do it with God.

Thirdly, it's to be given universally and regularly. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (16:2) he says, "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income." *Each* one of you – it's universal. First day of *every* week – it's regular.

Some of us go through needless pain by not being regular. If you teach over at the public school, do you decide each and every morning whether to go or not? How tortuous that would be. No, you decide and then it is regular. Anybody have a bank that is good with random mortgage payments? No, you decide and then it is regular. Any employees good with the boss just paying you when it moves him or her? Regularity is a help and it is what we do with important things.

Fourthly, it is to be given joyfully. "God loves a cheerful giver." (II Cor. 9:7) One percent with a happy attitude isn't quite it. Twenty percent with a lousy attitude isn't quite it. The right percent with the right attitude in the right way is it.

If I guaranteed a deposit of a billion dollars into your checking account in thirty days and then took up an offering this morning, would you give with an ease and a smile? Sure you would. That's what God has done. He's guaranteed you heaven, eternal life, spiritual blessings. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard what God has in store for those who love him.

So the found faithful steward understands the tithe.

But I think there is really only one key question. Do you want to be found faithful? Is that important to you? If it's important to you, then being found faithful with your money will sort itself out. It has to. And being found faithful in terms of the church you worship with will sort itself out.

Author Thomas Rainer tells of an interview Billy Graham had with an interviewer. The interviewer asked if he anticipated being given great rewards in heaven for the millions of lives he had impacted.

Billy Graham said that he was not sure of the extent of his own rewards. He went on to say that there is a faithful elderly woman whom he knows, who is right now on her knees praying for and giving to her little country church. For nearly 80 years, the sweet lady has been faithful to her Lord. To Billy Graham, that lady and many others like her, will receive the greatest rewards in heaven.

At the close of the interview, Billy Graham said these last words: "You see, we are not called to be successful. We are called (*and want to be found*) faithful."

Do you want to be found faithful? Let' all say, YES.

*If you'd like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors & elders of the church would welcome your call. revieffwood@gmail.com
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