

Mine, Mine, MINE — NOT!

Sermon for Sunday, April 22, 2007
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 6:24; Psalm 24:1, Leviticus 25:23

Open my wallet, pull out five bills and count them aloud: Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, one hundred. That's quite a lot. I wonder what I should do with all this? I know!

Place four of the bills in a clear glass bowl. Light a match and set the fifth one of fire, then drop it in the bowl so they all burn. Watch quietly until only ashes remain.

Some of you right now are wanting to jump up and say, "Hey Bruce, if you've got any more money you want to get rid of, how about giving it to me instead of burning it?"

Relax. That was fake money.

Why do we get so excited about seeing money burn? After all, it's just paper and metal, isn't it? What's the big deal about money?

That's what we're going to focus on today, and over the next month or so.

It's because money is much, much more than just paper and metal. Money is a symbol. It represents *things*: food, clothing, home, vehicle, stuff. It represents *abilities*: travel, power, control. It represents *feelings*: status, comfort, security. Money may be just a symbol, but what a powerful symbol!

It should not be surprising, then, that the Bible has a great deal to say about money. The gospels record thirty-eight parables told by Jesus. Sixteen of them are about money and possessions. The Bible has about 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,500 verses on money and possessions. The Bible has more to say about money than heaven, sex, and most any other topic.

God knows that we need help when it comes to money. That's the conclusion I come to, when I wonder about the popularity of this topic in the holy Scriptures.

Starting today and continuing through May, we're going to look at some of these Bible passages, and let God speak to us through them.

We're going to see what God's word has to teach us about being wise in managing money, being content with what we have, being generous with it to others and

to God's work, being in control over money rather than it controlling us, being in debt, being rich, and more.

But first, before getting into that, let's hear about the student who was applying to the College of Agriculture at university. The college's dean was interviewing the student and asked, "Why have you chosen this career?" he asked.

The student replied, "I dream of making a million dollars in farming, like my father."

The dean sat up straight in his chair and his eyes widened. Leaning forward he said, "Your father made a million dollars in farming?"

"No," replied the student. "But he always dreamed of it."

So many people dream of money, of striking it rich, of living comfortably. They think money will solve their problems.

Friends, you don't need me to tell you that's wrong thinking. You already know that. Money isn't the solution. The solution is in our attitude towards money. And the most important attitude of all — the one on which everything else in these messages is based, the one which is repeated time and again throughout the Bible — is about where the money came from and to whom it belongs.

1) Everything belongs to God

Listen to these passages from the Bible. They are from the Old Testament and the New Testament, right from the very beginning. Throughout the Bible, the message is the same: everything belongs to God.

Genesis 1:1, King James Version:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Psalm 24:1, New Revised Standard Version:

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.

Leviticus 25:23, Contemporary English Version:

[God speaking] "No land may be permanently bought or sold. It all belongs to me—it isn't your land, and you only live there for a little while."

John 1:1-3, New Revised Standard Version:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

God made the universe, and God has owner's rights to it. We're just tenants here; we don't have a claim to anything.

2) Transfer ownership to God

Since it all belongs to God, the best response on our part is to acknowledge that. Once we get this basic truth in its proper place, everything else in life will make a lot more sense. Everything else will fall into its proper place.

We can do that by transferring ownership of all that we have over to God. It works just the same as when you sell a used car. You sign the paper that's part of your licence, and that paper transfers ownership to the buyer. When you sell your home, you sign the deed, and that legally transfers the property to the new owner.

What I want to encourage you to do, is transfer ownership of all you have to God. Of course this is only symbolic, since you can't literally give a piece of paper to God. But remember burning those twenty dollars bills? Doing something symbolic can be very meaningful.

In the sermon outline included with your bulletin, there is a document for transferring ownership. Look at it. Signing this document means that we give everything we consider ours over to God: clothes, vehicle, home, income, savings, debts, job. It also means our bodies and our time and what we do with them, our family, friends and all other relationships. It means what we have at the present as well as everything in the future.

Let's be clear on this: signing this transfer doesn't change anything at all. Remember what we just read in the Bible: *already* belongs to God. All we're doing is just acknowledging this reality. So whether you sign it or not doesn't make the slightest bit of difference. It's still God's, regardless.

The truth is, it does make a big difference in one place—a *huge* difference: it changes our attitude towards money and possessions and life. The change is accountability.

Accountability means that we are responsible to someone else for what we do. We are no longer free to do as we please (as if we ever were! It just becomes more plain this way.)

Here's a very simple example. Let's say you're wishing to get a newer car, dress, computer, etc. Perhaps in the old life you would just go out and get one. Now that you are spending someone else's money, you have to stop and consider it. Here are some questions you might ask yourself:

- Do I need it?
- How many do I already have?
- How much will I use it?
- How long will it last?
- Can I borrow it from a friend or family member?
- Is there anything that I already own that I can substitute for it?
- Can I do without it?
- Am I able to clean and maintain it myself? Am I willing to?
- Will I be able to repair it?
- Have I researched it to get the best quality for the best price?
- How will I dispose of it when I'm done using it?
- Are the resources that went into it renewable or nonrenewable?
- Is it made of recycled material, and is it recyclable?

That's pretty simple. What happens when we start asking the same kind of questions about how we spend our time, our abilities; how we treat other people?

So I challenge you today: Are you willing to sign your life over to God? Do you trust God to provide for you? Even more, can God trust you to manage his business on his behalf?

Transfer of Ownership

I surrender to God all claims I have to any property I might have considered my own, both personal and real. As well I surrender to God my body, my life, my time and my relationships. I give up all rights and privileges I may have had with those things and people.

I do this by faith, trusting in God's promises to supply all my needs "according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" [Philippians 4:19]. That does not mean that I retire from work; but now I work for a new master, and with a new purpose.

Date: _____

Signature: _____