

Fear, folly, fraud, or freedom?

Today I'm talking about money.

In the world in general, and for many of us, Money is a big deal.

Many of us go to work day after day, simply to get paid, so we have the money we need to live.

But for many people, money, or the lack of it, brings stress, envy, headaches and exhaustion, but I don't believe this is our calling as the children of God.

So the aim of this talk is;

That we might know freedom when it comes to money!

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I don't profess to be an expert in this, but the bible has plenty to say about money and I'm keen to explore some of that.

Money is mentioned over 500 times in the bible in one way or another.

It's a big deal in the church. Every Sunday we collect it and we pray about it. And we have a committee that meets every month to make decisions about it.

Some people totally compromise themselves to get money, or more money. Some lie or steal for it. And some even kill for it.

Money is a good servant but a terrible master.

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You might know this verse from 1 Timothy, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

So it's the love of the stuff that's actually the problem. And it can be a big problem.

Here's the rest of that verse:

Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." 1 Timothy 6:10 NIV

That sounds like the opposite of freedom.

When Jesus is explaining the meaning of the parable of the sower, he alludes to this.

Matthew 13:22 Jesus explains "The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful."

So wealth has the ability to deceive. To trick us out of seeing things as they truly are.

I believe this deception is driven by what I call "the un-holy trinity". That is; the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In case you hadn't noticed, we don't live in a vacuum. In my experience, we are frequently invited away from Godliness in regard to money.

And part of the deception is to believe that we can stand against these forces on our own. When Jesus was tempted in the desert, he only weapon he used to rebuff the suggestions of the enemy was the word of God,

So in the midst of this charged environment, how on earth do we learn to live in freedom, or grow further into freedom in regard to money?  
Well of course the answer is not found on earth.

In Romans 12:2 Paul says:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind....."

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As we continue to submit ourselves to God, he will do his renewing work in us.  
If we let him, he will lead this process, since he is the author and perfecter of our faith.

Remember how Jesus said " Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. ....my yoke is easy and my burden is light"? That's the freedom we're talking about.  
It's not that there's no burden to carry. We have responsibility, but it's not meant to drag us down.

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This is a YOKE, as distinct from the YOLK.  
That's thing's the yoke. So an easy yoke is.....  
Sharing in .... walking together. Jesus yoke, not the one you may have carved for yourself.

Matthew 11:29-30 "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

In the bible, God makes it clear that he is willing and able to provide for our physical needs. He wants us to trust him with this. But he also gives us responsibility to cooperate with him.

The Lord is faithful. He calls us to respond faithfully.

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Let's look at some examples.

#### Example 1

Right back in the garden of Eden, the Lord provided for the needs of the people he'd made, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food." Genesis 1:29

Then He gave the man responsibilities within that garden.

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

Genesis 2:15 NIV

See God provided but the people had a responsibility to respond appropriately.

#### Example 2

The Lord provided Manna for the Israelites for 40 years while they lived in the desert. The Lord provided this miraculous food each day. They didn't need to go shopping. They just had to go outside and pick it up.

But there were certain requirements regarding this food. If they were not faithful to their God given responsibilities, what was meant to be a blessing became offensive to them.

#### Example 3 New Testament:

Matthew 17. The coin in the mouth of the fish for the temple tax: God provided the money, but Peter had to do something to appropriate it. He had to go fishing! He had to believe Jesus in the first place. Financial faithfulness can sometimes look ridiculous.

#### Example 4.

In the passage just prior to what Arthur read from Luke 12, Jesus tells a parable about greed.

There's this bloke who's barns were not big enough to hold all his stuff. So he torn them down and built bigger barns.

Reading from Luke 12, verse 18, the man says to himself; "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."".

That sounds to me exactly like what almost every Australian aspires to in their retirement. And Jesus continues the story: 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'<sup>21</sup> "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

That man was not faithful with what God had given him.

Then the next bit, which Arthur read, is a call to freedom.

"Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.

And jumping to verse 25

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

"Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!

And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.

But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

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“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Luke 12:22-34 NIV

Jesus is on a different planet to most people when it comes to money.

He mustn't have seen all the superannuation and insurance company adds on there and in the paper.

I love the freedom expressed in that passage.

"Do not be afraid little flock, your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor."

So where is the basis for fear or worry when it comes to money? The greedy person has plenty to fear, but not the faithful one.

We need miracles to happen if we are to live in the freedom that Jesus is describing. . This freedom is not a commodity of this world.

Conformity to this world will not lead you to freedom.

Non-conformity to the world is a lifestyle choice. It's not a once of thing. It's on-going.

It's part of dying to self.

Which is like taking up your cross, daily.

In preparing for this talk, and seeing the freedom Jesus is talking about, I can see I have a long way to go. I keep straining against the yoke, struggling to trust his gentle counsel, to do it his way.

And as with everything God asks of us, if we cooperate with him, he will provide us with what we need to be faithful.

We know that in one critical respect, Adam and Eve were not faithful to what the Lord required of them.

There was one tree in the garden of Eden that they were not to eat from. But they helped themselves anyway. They were deceived and decided that they knew better.

They decided the Lord's provision needed a slight modification. As a result of their sin the Lord made several modifications, and they weren't slight. They were drastic, far reaching and very costly. Jesus still bears the scars.

But those scars are also the marks of restoration, because the Lord is merciful.

Why would we want to withhold any part of our lives from a God like this?

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I believe that when we are not completely honest or law abiding with our money, it's a bit like saying to God, "I'm not sure that your provision is adequate, I'll just make a slight modification or two. Maybe in your tax return. Maybe on an insurance claim. Maybe at work, or when you're buying stuff.

Speaking of tax, in Matthew 22:21 Jesus said, give back to Caesar what is Caesar's. and to God what is God's.

Not because Caesar was necessarily a righteous user of public money....., the Romans were an occupying foreign power. God's chosen people resented their presence and authority. And Caesar expected to be worshipped, as if he was God. And here's Jesus telling people to pay their taxes to him!

But Jesus asks, "Who's face is on the coin?"

So if we can get free from greed, or fear, or dishonesty, we are better able to hear what God might say to us about generosity.

Generosity and giving can take different forms, but let's touch on tithing first. Tithing means giving a tenth. This was part of God's law which Moses gave to the Israelites.

But tithing didn't start with the Law. It started way back in Genesis, with Abram and Melchizedek.

So Abraham had set out to rescue his nephew Lot, who was in a lot of trouble. Abram went to war against four kings and rescued Lot. On his way home Melchizedek comes out to meet him.

(If you are not familiar with Melchizedek, look him up. He is one very special dude).

Genesis 14:18-20

18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.20 And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Then there's Jacob. Still 500 years before the Law, in Genesis 28.

Jacob's just had an amazing dream, in which God has promised him great blessing and faithfulness. When Jacob wakes up he responds to God's revelation with a vow. "And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."

With both Jacob and Melchizedek, they gave a tenth as an act of gratitude.

This isn't law, this is worship.

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I hope you can see the reciprocal faithfulness with both of these.

We see the opposite in Malachi 3:8-12

God had been entreating the Israelites for centuries, but unfaithfulness was their predominant response.

8 "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me." But you ask, "How are we robbing you?" In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse—your whole nation—. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

V10, Test me in this! That's an interesting challenge.

The Lord was inviting them to conduct an experiment to prove his faithfulness!

As Ange said a fortnight ago, The generosity of our God invites an equally generous response.

As people living under grace, we've experienced the outrageous love of God.

Jesus said "your father has been pleased to give us the kingdom....! He hasn't limited himself to 10%.

You probably know the account of the poor widow in Mark 12:41-44

"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

She had two coins. Had she put in one of them, that would have been 50%. But she gave them both, all she had to live on!

Being a widow in those days, and being poor means she was among the most vulnerable in that society. In the preceding verses we see Jesus ripping into the "teachers of the law" for their grossly unjust treatment of the widows they were responsible to care for. So she couldn't rely on support from the people God had appointed.

And yet she gave all she had to live on. Why would she do that? Maybe it was an act of obedience. It was certainly an act of faithfulness. And maybe an act of worship.

Instead of Jesus criticising her for being "over the top", he draws attention to her as if she is a model giver!

When we gave our lives to Jesus, if you've done that, what part of your life were you meant to take back for yourself? The correct answer is None. (I don't know about you, but I don't think I'm in danger of over-giving myself into God's hands.)

So I would say the money you have at your disposal is not actually yours anymore. Because the moment it became yours it becomes his. My wallet, my bank account, my superannuation! All his.

I'm reminded of a conversation I had recently from the mother of one of our young people. Her son had not long entered the casual workforce and was still working out the whole money thing.

He'd planned to give a tenth of his income as a gift to God,. But on this occasion he thought God was asking him to give everything in his account. So he did. He gave a thousand dollars extra.

I was excited when I heard that story. This teenager was on the road to financial freedom.

I guess that guy knew he was due to receive his next pay again soon. But the next day, the exact amount he'd given was deposited into his account. Well done good and faithful servant.

This financial freedom can look like foolishness to people who don't understand. Don't be put off by this.

Im sure some people would question the wisdom of he Macedonian Christians in Paul's time, in 2 Corinthians 8.

1 And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people.

I find that a timely challenge, especially in the middle of our missions month.

There's so much more that could be said about all this. If you are looking for a succinct summary of what I've been saying, have another look at the 2 Corinthians 9 passage in the Grapevine.

In Philippians 4:12-13 Paul writes about the place of freedom he had come to, even in the midst of his great trials.;

12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

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I would encourage you to open yourself to God in this area of your life. Maybe you've been on this journey with him for years. Maybe some of this is new. We can trust him and learn from him.

As we step out in faith, we will see his faithfulness, because Faithfulness brings freedom.

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Finding freedom.

Ask, confess, repent, agree, commit.

Changing your mind about stuff.

Study his word. Step out in faithfulness.

Let's pray for this.