

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
October 12, 2014
“Financial Fruits of Spiritual Transformation”

Memory Verses:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

“Financial Fruits of Spiritual Transformation”

Jesus Christ had a lot to say about money. According to Randy Alcorn in his book, The Treasure Principle, Jesus’ teachings about finances and wealth account for about 15% of his words in the Bible, which is more than his teachings on Heaven and Hell combined. There are preachers and teachers in the world today that would have you believe that God wants you to be as wealthy on Earth as you possibly can be because wealth is a sign of blessing from God. Then there are others who would say that Christians are not supposed to be wealthy at all because, they would say, poverty is a sign of piety. Jesus never set a maximum allowable income to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus was interested in changing our hearts, cleansing and healing them, so that we could reflect his righteousness in all that we do, especially in the way that we treat our finances. He told us that our hearts are set on where our treasure lies (Mat. 6:21), so if we dedicate our lives to sin and self-indulgence, we can know that our hearts are far from his. Likewise, if we repent and seek to do his will with our lives (including our money) then we can know that we will have stored up treasures in heaven (Mat. 6:20).

So what does this spiritual transformation look like, going from earthly, self-centeredness to heavenly, Christ-centeredness? Alcorn emphasizes the scripture of Luke 3:7-14 to show evidence of the fruits of such repentance.

Read Luke 3:7-14

What did John the Baptist preach that the listeners should do? = “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” (v.8)

What were the 3 groups that asked John what they should do? = the crowd, tax collectors and soldiers.

John told the crowd that there was no fooling God and that He was ready to start chopping down the trees that didn’t bear good fruit. John came to them to preach repentance and that they should not just be baptized, but that they should ACT LIKE they had repented. It should be evident in their lives that they were bearing fruit consistent with repentance. Three groups of people asked John how they should go about doing that and his responses all had to do with the people’s attitudes toward money. To paraphrase Randy Alcorn, John the Baptist couldn’t even begin to talk to them about living a spiritual life without correcting their way of looking at wealth! That’s how important it is!

1. John told the **crowd** to sacrifice personal **excess** to meet the **needs** of others!

These people had just been told that being a descendent of Abraham didn’t matter in God’s eyes. Their trump card of being God’s “chosen people” wasn’t going to save them from this reckoning that was coming, only repentance. So imagine their surprise when John doesn’t give them some prayers or penance to do, but instructs them to show their repentance by sharing their food and clothing with their neighbors in need. God expects the same from us. If we seek to please Him, then we don’t need to wallow in extravagance while other human beings around us, and around the world, die from a lack of the essential needs of life. As American Christians, God has allowed us to prosper greatly. The poorest among us would be considered well-off in some areas of the world. God doesn’t expect any of us to end

world hunger by ourselves, but if we are allowing ourselves to be spiritually transformed, we will have compassion and empathy for those who are struggling. At the Day of Judgment, Jesus tells us that He will say 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' (Mat. 25:40)

2. John told the **tax collectors** not to take more than they were **authorized**.

The tax collectors had a well-earned reputation for being crooked and taking more money for taxes than they should only to line their own pockets with the excess. John told this group in no uncertain terms to stop this. He didn't say to stop collecting taxes (and he didn't tell others to stop paying them). He told the tax collectors to stop cheating the people and profiting at their expense. This is true for us today, as well. Whenever we do business, we don't need to seek the greatest gain for ourselves, no matter the cost to the other person. Proverbs 11:1 says "*The LORD detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him.*" In short, if we want to show that we are conforming to the image of Jesus Christ, then we need to be more concerned about the costs we impose on others and less concerned about our bottom line.

3. John told the **soldiers** to be **content** with their pay and not **rob** or **extort** money from others.

The soldiers of the 1st century had a good deal of authority over the average citizen. These soldiers kept the peace and functioned a lot like our police today. If the leader of a particular unit was immoral, and a lot of them were, he could charge people "protection" money and behave just like any other mob or group of organized criminals. The average person was not armed or trained in combat, and they had little hope of appealing to higher authorities without getting on the local soldier's bad side, so the best they could hope for was to pay the extortion money and do what they could with the rest of their livelihood. John told the soldiers to knock off all the illegal gains and be happy with the pay that they received for their work from the government. In the same way, we are to be content with the wages that we receive and to do our work "as working for the Lord." (Col. 3:23) If we are focusing on our paychecks, grumbling about not having enough money to get that new house, car, boat, vacation, etc., then we can't be focusing on the Lord. God expects us to work hard and be fruitful to provide for our families both financially and spiritually, and we can't do either with a heart full of greed or envy.

Take Home:

As we've seen today, the way we look at money reveals the way we look at God. Over the next few weeks we will be studying more about the attitudes that God wants us to have toward our finances and how we can experience real, personal transformation towards being a better steward for Him.

This week:

Take a moment or two every day to assess your spending habits, your feelings toward the poor and needy, and your attitude toward work and money in general. If you find something that is displeasing to God or yourself, ask God to change your mind and your heart and give you compassion for others and a desire to please Him.