

CENTRAL BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MONEY IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW?

A PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR NT BIBLICAL THEOLOGY I NT 571

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2007

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Introduction

The gospel of Matthew holds a unique position by being the first book of the New Testament in canonical order. Matthew is not the first book of the New Testament by chronological order. Most scholars believe that Matthew was written after Mark and that much of Matthew was borrowed from Mark.¹

Matthew was written to show who Jesus Christ is. We can gain some insight into who Christ was and what he accomplished by some of the titles that were given to Him.²

The purpose of this paper is to look at the Gospel of Matthew to see the significance of Matthew's account about what Jesus taught regarding money, possessions, and in a larger context, stewardship. There is some overlap in these areas with regard to discipleship. What did Jesus teach about money in the Gospel of Matthew? Are there any sub-themes in relation to what Jesus stated about money?

Accomplishing this task will be done by defining the different terms used for money in Matthew, tracing the various sub-themes that occur within Matthew surrounding money, and by looking at some texts within Matthew and by examining these texts, more questions could possibly be created which would lead to eventual further study.

¹ D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p.32–33. Even though this paper is not mainly concerned with dating issues, nevertheless a brief statement regarding these introductory issues will aid the reader in understanding the context in which Matthew was written. Most scholars hold to Markan priority which states that Mark was written before Matthew. There are also wide-ranging disagreements over the date of Matthew. Many scholars hold to a late date of Matthew and their reasons are numerous as well as those who hold to an earlier date of Matthew. This author takes an earlier date position with regard to Matthew.

² David K. Lowery, "A Theology of Matthew," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck and Darrell L. Bock (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 25.

Matthew

What do we know about Matthew himself? We know that he was of Jewish decent and that he was a tax collector³. Being a tax collector was not an honorable profession in those days, but Matthew had no problem in referring to himself as a tax collector⁴. His profession led him to be able to record the teachings of Jesus that were related to money with extreme accuracy and precision.⁵ It is also known that Matthew deals with the subject of money more than any other gospel.⁶

Money

What do we know about money itself and the different types of money that were referred to in the Gospel of Matthew? We know that money plays a large role within our society and this is no different during New Testament times. Money itself is neither moral, immoral, or amoral.

³. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), p. 6.

⁴. Gene A. Getz, *A Biblical Theology Of Material Possessions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), p.70. Getz gives more insight regarding the profession of a publican or tax collector by reminding the readers that tax collectors were hated by the Jews and in their profession they undoubtedly had many opportunities to be dishonest and extort money from people. He also states that Matthew had a unique opportunity to show others how Christ changed his perspective on money.

⁵. Werner G. Marx, "Money Matters In Matthew," *Bib Sac* 136 (1979): p. 152. Marx notes that Matthew makes reference to himself in Mt. 10:3 by using the term ο τελωνης. Some would argue that Matthew did not write this gospel, but this same designation is not found in any of the other gospels which record this account.

⁶. David Malick, *An Introduction to Matthew*, Cited December 3, 2007, www.bible.org. Interestingly enough, there is some disagreement on this because some scholars will say that Luke has more references than Matthew. Darrell L. Bock, "A Theology of Luke-Acts," in *A Biblical Theology Of The New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck and Darrell L. Bock (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 159 states that Luke wrote more on wealth than any other NT writer. Marx, "Money Matters In Matthew," p. 152 gives statistical data regarding the references to money in the Synoptics: Matthew -44; Mark 6; Luke 22. Marx states that this statistical data coupled with Matthew's use of money words supplies more convincing evidence.

The uses of money can be moral or immoral in nature. We know that money was important in Jesus' day because He made mention of it in Matthew as well as the other gospels. Before money was used widely in commercial transactions, people conducted their business by bartering goods. Money became more useful when social structures and communities became more complex in nature.

There is diversity when it comes to money. There was not one particular unit of measure or type of money that was used in the Bible. It is important to understand what each type/unit is and its significance when used in a particular passage. Matthew, being a tax collector had some familiarity with the various types of money and this is reflected in his gospel by the various references and uses of different monetary terms not found elsewhere in other gospels.⁷

In referencing money in different passages, we see that Matthew used different money words to bring the reader into greater understanding of what he was trying to convey. Some of these terms are as follows:

κοδραντης was a copper coin that was the smallest of the Roman coins (Mt. 5:26).

ασσαριον was a larger Roman coin made of copper. (Mt. 10:29)

χρυσος and χαλκος precious metals- gold and copper that are referred to as money. (Mt. 10:9,10).

δηναριον was a silver Roman coin, that is smaller than our quarter. This coin was standard pay for one day's work. (Mt. 20:1-16)

ταλαντον was equal to six-thousand δηναρι ⁸

διδραχμα was the silver coin that was associated with the temple tax. (Mt. 17:24-27)⁹

⁷ Malick, *An Introduction to Matthew* Malick states that Matthew uses three money terms not found in the other gospels (Mt. 17:24, 27; 18:24).

⁸ Marx, "Money Matters In Matthew," p. 153–56.

⁹ Oded Borowski, "From Shekels To Talents: Money In The Ancient World," *BAR* 19 (1993): p. 70.

Matthew, in using these varied terms, is giving the reader detailed and precise information regarding different monetary units and transactions, whereas the other Gospel writers do not go into such intricate details regarding some of the same accounts which occur in Mark and Luke. This is one of the many elements within the Gospel that prove Matthew's authorship.

What Did Matthew Say About Money?

The public ministry of Jesus spanned approximately three and one-half years. Much of this time, Jesus spent teaching. It is during these times of teaching where Jesus has the opportunity to teach using parables. Gene Getz states that Jesus taught in parables primarily to teach spiritual truth by using what was most familiar to those He was teaching.¹⁰

Giving

Jesus taught in various contexts regarding giving. This is first seen in the Sermon on the Mount where the instruction is as follows: *Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away (Mt. 5:42 NKJV)*. This occurs at the end of a pericope where Jesus is challenging his followers to do things that would seem to be out of the ordinary or contradictory in nature. He is giving these instructions in a community context in getting them to see this in context of the kingdom. We can see from the text that this is an imperative and there is some progression within the pericope and that each subsequent admonition is building on the previous which then leads to the conclusion of loving one's enemies. From reading this pericope one would think that there would be an easy interpretation and subsequent application. There are differing views as to the thrust of this passage. Donald Hegner states that this verse takes the line of thought in the preceding verses by teaching a charitable response to all who may ask for something or those who wish to borrow. Hegner also reminds the reader that there is OT precedent for this teaching (Deut. 15:7-8). The pericope itself is going from specific admonitions

¹⁰ Getz, *A Biblical Theology Of Material Possessions*, p. 67. Getz further states that he was tapping into what was uppermost in people's minds at all economic levels in an effort to capture their attention.

to a broad sweeping admonition regarding a spirit of charity and not focusing simply on behavioral actions towards others.¹¹

Craig Blomberg takes the opposite position by stating that Jesus was not commanding that his followers necessarily give all beggars everything they demand. Jesus is enjoining them to avoid the dominant principle of reciprocity. Blomberg is not discounting charity, but qualifies it by attempting to determine people's needs and pointing them towards the help that will stand a reasonable chance to remedy the situation.¹²

The next aspect of giving recorded by Matthew is also part of the Sermon on the Mount and it deals with the matter of public giving:

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. (Mt. 6:1-4 NKJV)

We are given a clear admonition here in this passage with regard to public giving. The previous passage in Mt. 5 spoke about our willingness to give. It is observed that people will give for various reasons, they will give to obtain admiration, to secure superiority, to gain favor or advantage over someone or something, some will give out of love and appreciation, and others will give out of guilt or atonement. Regardless of the reasons, Jesus is teaching his disciples that public giving needs to be done with the right motive, that there is a degree of privacy and secrecy involved and that a reward from God the Father will come if the giving is done in the right way. We see that Jesus also uses an expression of exaggeration or hyperbole when he speaks of the

¹¹ Donald A Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), p. 130–31. Hagner also points out that the concept of borrowing is also found in Luke 6:34-35.

¹² Craig Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches*, ed. D.A. Carson, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Leicester: Apollos, 1999), p. 130.

sounding of a trumpet with regard to one's gift.¹³ Within Matthew's account, the reader will not see another reference to giving until Matthew 23 when Jesus is engaged in a discourse with the Pharisees:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (Mt. 23:23 NKJV)

Jesus is acknowledging the OT practice of tithing as being legitimate, but he rebukes the Pharisees for their inconsistency. He points out that they were tithing on what would be considered the most disputable of substances, but in their haste to be the perfectionist law-keepers that they were, He rebukes them for their failure to practice the more important facets of the law, such as justice, mercy, and faith(loyalty). Jesus was trying to get the Pharisees to see that they could not observe the law as they had so desired to do and neglect the spirit of the law. Julius Crawford states that Jesus was pointing out to the Pharisees that the payment of the tithe itself should be a pledge of faithfulness to the larger stewardship of law, justice and mercy and that failure in these is a violation of the tithing covenant.¹⁴

Priorities/Sacrifice

Matthew records various episodes where Jesus speaks of the importance of sacrifice and priorities with regard to money and ultimately stewardship. This is seen in two different passages, both of which are rather short in length but the point is made in short order.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

¹³ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 64. Schnackenburg states that no such actual behavior has been established.

¹⁴ Julius Crawford, *The Call To Christian Stewardship* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1924), p. 25. Crawford also reminds the reader that in spite of all of the faults and shortcomings that the Pharisees had, that they could be commended for their tithing and that Jesus went on record not only as endorsing obedience to the law of the tithe, but as considering it a duty.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Mt. 6:19-21,24 NJKV)

It is quite clear in these verses that this theme of priorities is building upon the foundation that was set forth in the earlier part of the chapter with regard to public giving. Jesus has now turned the attention of the reader to issues of the heart. He is making the case that earthly treasures run the risk of being destroyed or stolen and then contrasts that with the fact that heavenly treasures cannot be destroyed or stolen. In today's context, we would use the word "possessions" in place of treasures. Some would attempt to make the case that Jesus, by making these statements is against private property and ownership. Lockyer refutes such notions by stating, "Nowhere does he condemn private ownership and property in itself. He knew that was a recognized part of the world system of his time."¹⁵ Jesus is also reminding his followers regarding loyalty and values because we will ultimately express loyalty to what we value most. What are heavenly treasures? If we can deduce that earthly treasures are possessions, then how can we know or understand what heavenly treasures are? Craig Blomberg has probably given the best definition with regard to heavenly treasures. He defines them as follows: "To embrace all that persists beyond the grave-godly character, souls won and nurtured for Christ, faithful exercise of spiritual gifts, and obedience to the whole counsel of God's word throughout every area of life."¹⁶ Jesus is not against money or possessions, unless they become the dominant factor within the life of a believer. It is also seen in this passage that one cannot effectively serve two masters, because he will hate one and love the other or be loyal to one and despise the other. Again, the reader is seeing the

¹⁵ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Teachings of Jesus* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1976), p. 132. He reminds the reader that in the account of the rich young ruler found in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus told him to sell his tangible assets and not give them away, thereby affirming property rights and the legitimacy of bargain and sale.

¹⁶ Craig Blomberg, "On Wealth And Worry: Matthew 6:19-34- Meaning And Significance," *CTR* 6 (1992): p. 77.

emphasis regarding one's loyalties and affections. People lack the ability to effectively serve two masters, for they will inevitably polarize their attitudes toward each.¹⁷

With regard to sacrifice, Matthew records two parables spoken by Jesus that are unusually short in length (one parable is one verse, the other is two verses).

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid: and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went out and sold all that he had and bought it. (Mt. 13:44-46 NKJV)

These two parables are commonly referred to as the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl of great price. Why did Matthew record these two inevitably short parables that were spoken by Jesus? In the text it is clearly stated that these are kingdom parables and that they are also companion parables. We also note from the text that the result in both cases is that each party went and sold what they possessed which was meant to convey a total commitment on the part of a disciple.¹⁸

Wages

We see in Matthew 20 that value is placed on labor and that a wage is paid as a result of that labor. It is also in this chapter where Matthew uses money terminology in giving value to that labor. This parable with its labor and monetary terminology is not directly teaching a lesson on money itself, but rather Jesus is using a vehicle (money) in order to make sure that his disciples will understand the point that he is trying to make within the parable.

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard and

¹⁷. David Murchie, "The New Testament View Of Wealth Accumulation," *JETS* 21 (1978): p. 337. Service to money categorically rules out the possibility of service to God, and the accumulation of money is indicative of service to it.

¹⁸. Jack D. Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13* (St Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1969), p. 116.

whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.’ So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’ And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good? So the last will be first, and the first last: For many are called, but few chosen. (Mt. 20:1-16 NKJV)

This parable is only found in Matthew and it is being used to teach the graciousness and generosity of God. It also teaches a theme in found in other places regarding the first and the last (“the first shall be last and the last shall be first”). Schnackenburg shows the reader the lesson of the parable being the goodness of God. He states that because the laborer decides to pay the laborers hired last the same wages as those whom he hired first that this is how God proceeds and that the parable itself will convey the unexpected, incomprehensible goodness of God.¹⁹

Taxes

We see in two different parables that Jesus was directly involved in two different exchanges with regard to the payment of taxes. The first exchange was regarding the temple tax:

When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, “Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?” He said, “Yes” And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?” Peter said to Him, “From strangers.” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are free.” Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money, take that and give it to them for Me and you.”(Mt. 17:24-27 NKJV)

¹⁹ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 192. He further states that the intent of the parable was not to draw any lines with regard to just wages, labor relations, but that it is solely oriented to the conduct of God and is another way for people to understand God in terms of goodness and mercy.

What is known about the temple tax that is spoken of in this exchange with Jesus? The amount of the tax was a half-shekel which represented the approximate equivalent of a day's wage and the tax was assessed annually.²⁰ We also see that this parable is unique to Matthew and that this story presents Jesus as a loyal Jew who pays the tax even though Jesus did not view the temple as being a lasting institution. ²¹Jesus used a teaching tool of asking a question of Peter to illustrate a principle of freedom. Matthew uses monetary terminology (διδραχμον) that is not found anywhere else in the New Testament. Jesus was teaching God's people that they should be free from this previously God-ordained taxation principle. Jesus paid the tax in order to avoid any offense that might come as a result.²²

The second exchange found in Matthew regarding taxes was an exchange with the Pharisees. The Pharisees asked a lot of questions to which they received answers that they did not necessarily like or want. Their questions were usually asked in attempts to entrap Jesus and they were never with pure or right motives.

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do you care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test me, you hypocrites? Show me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" When they heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.(Mt. 22:15-22 NKJV)

²⁰ T.E. Schmidt, "Taxes," in *Dictionary of Jesus and The Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 806. The tax was paid by all Jewish males over the age of twenty except for the priests.

²¹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), p. 512.

²² Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches*, p. 139. Blomberg further states that at that time they were on the verge of entering an era where they would no longer compulsorily contribute to his work according to a fixed standard. This was not an indication of an abolition of political taxes.

Matthew again uses monetary terms that are beyond the common or ordinary, they are detailed terms that he would have knowledge of due to his profession as a tax collector. He uses the terms διδραχον and νοσμιμα κηνσου in this passage to give the reader greater detail than using a common or generic term for money. The tax that is referred to here is a head tax that was done periodically by means of a census and liability regarding this tax was more difficult to assess. Males aged fourteen to sixty-five were required to pay this tax.²³ We also see that a later New Testament emphasis regarding the payment of taxes was built upon this event (See Romans 13).

Wealth

We see that Jesus had a position towards wealth in that it could be a hindrance to a disciple of His. We saw earlier that man cannot serve two masters effectively. How does Jesus address the subject of wealth in the context of discipleship?

Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "Honor your father and mother," and, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to Him, "All these things I kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." (Mt. 19:16-22 NKJV)

This rich young man came to Christ with a legitimate question regarding his eventual eternal destiny. Interestingly enough, the young man thought that eternal life could be obtained by doing a good work. Jesus replied back to him regarding the law and then addressed the issue of wealth and possessions and how they could be a potential distraction and a hindrance to a committed disciple of Christ. Here is an individual case that was intended as an admonitory paradigm for all of Jesus' disciples but yet, the rich young ruler decided that his possessions were more important to him and thus brings into question whether or not the young man actually kept the

²³. Schmidt, "Taxes," p. 805. This fact is consistent with other Gospel accounts.

commandment “love your neighbor as yourself”²⁴

Responsibility

Jesus uses another monetary parable in order to teach another lesson regarding responsibility within a discipleship and an eschatological context.

For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents, saying, Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look I have gained five more talents besides them. His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord. He also who had received two talents came and said, Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look I have gained two more talents besides them. His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord. Then he who had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went, and hid my talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours. But his lord answered and said to him, You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who had, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. (Mt. 25-14-29 NKJV)

Here in this parable we see several lessons about responsibility. These servants were given responsibility to properly manage the property of their lord. This represents proper management, stewardship, and sound investment principles. When it came time to settle accounts with their master, all but one servant was able to show a gain on his master's money. The lord rebuked the one who was unprofitable. This parable suggests that the interval between the Lord's gift and his

²⁴. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), p. 475. Keener also states that one is also less likely to maintain possessions when one recognizes that disciples are merely stewards or managers to execute the master's will.

return ought to be used for profitable trading.²⁵

Forgiveness

Matthew records a parable of Jesus regarding an unforgiving servant with regards to monetary debt to teach his disciples lessons on debt, forgiveness, and humility.

Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all. And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.’”(Mt. 18:21-35 NKJV)

This parable uses two different terms of monetary units, talents and denarii, again illustrating Matthew’s fondness and tendency to use detailed and specific financial terminology. Gene Getz states that Jesus used this parable of indebtedness to illustrate the importance of forgiveness.²⁶ We see the fact that debt represents bondage and at some point the master was on the verge of requiring that the debtor along with his family and possessions be completely sold in order to satisfy the debt that was owed. This debtor was able to beg for patience and mercy and he was eventually forgiven of the debt, but then forget the importance of the forgiveness that was extended to him for such a large amount of money, then he went and tried to collect a very

²⁵ Warren Quanbeck, “Stewardship in the Teachings of Jesus,” in *Stewardship In Contemporary Theology*, ed. T.K. Thompson (New York: Association Press, 1960), p. 52.

²⁶ Getz, *A Biblical Theology Of Material Possessions*, p. 65.

insignificant amount of money in comparison to what he owed his master. We see the inconsistency of the servant and eventually when the master finds out what has transpired, then he recalls the servant and punishes him for failing to forgive. Jesus masterfully closes the parable by emphatically stating what the penalty would be for refusal to forgive. Keener states, “In Jesus’ strongly worded ethical pronouncements characteristic of the Gospel tradition, this parable forces Matthew’s audience to interpret the rest of Jesus’ ethical teaching in light of grace.”²⁷ We are also able to learn lessons regarding the bondage and crippling effects of debt as well in this parable.

Conclusion

We have learned in a larger context the relationship between money and possessions in relationship to service within the kingdom. Money in and of itself is neutral, but can either be used for good or evil; it can be a great help or a hindrance. Money scenarios, as seen in several parables can be used to teach object lessons that are not directly related to money itself, but the principles derived from those lessons can be applied to similar situations that one would face from an economic standpoint.

Giving is an acceptable discipline, but it is to be done with a degree of privacy and secrecy as to avoid impure motives.

Taxes are an ever-present reality that Jesus himself faced in multiple settings and those settings formed addition NT teaching.

Matthew by writing in the manner that he employed, has demonstrated a strong interest in the right and proper use of money and thereby we are empowered and enabled through proper reading and study to have the ability to form a proper and Biblical theology concerning money.

²⁷. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 461.

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