

Money in our hearts (Luke 16:1-13; Amos 8:4-7)

Jesus has a zeal against the human willingness to turn wealth into an idol.

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What if I told you that, during my first year as a pastor, a drug dealer approached me and said he had a \$40,000 gift for the church, and that this gift was his way of making amends for his past deeds?

Take a second and simply ask, *What would I do in this situation?*

Ready?

Would you be mad at me for telling him that I'd accept his gift? Or for the fact that during the conversation I was already making plans for the good we could do with this dishonest money?

And would it be egregious if, after he was settled in his decision, I told him that giving the church this money wouldn't solve his problems? (After all, he was still selling drugs!)

I should have kept quiet. Once he realized that the problem was not what he did with his money but how he earned it and *what he was doing to people*...well, he decided to work on his heart instead of giving away his money.

Don't say it. I know you're thinking it. And don't worry: I said it. "You know, you could do *both*!"

Money has been used to fix problems caused by evil; it has also been the cause of many of humanity's woes. The *love* of money has perpetuated many great evils as well. Jesus digs deep into this in Luke 16:1-13, speaking directly to the possessors of money—the lenders, the collectors, the temple agents. He has a zeal against their dishonest practice and their willingness to turn wealth into an idol.

It's not about drug dealers tithing regularly, though they should. (And every faith community has a few "drug dealers"—wealthy folk doing questionable work.) Nor is it about making friends with dishonest people to do good work, not on purpose anyway. Jesus is saying that the most important thing about money is what we do with it in our hearts.

Do we use money to love God's people as an act of worship, or do we use money to serve our own interests? Do our riches come at the expense of others, or do we continue to abide in a moral vision that protects our neighbors as God's children? When we finally get *all this money*—you know how much "all this" means for you; for me it's like \$45—do we now consider ourselves God? Who is serving who here?

These are the questions of this parable. And believers with comfortable means and adequate access to power need to have these questions set before them.

The challenge for us all is this: At what price—or pledge level—do these questions become too inconvenient to ask?