



Making Ends Meet (Meeting God's ends)

Church of the Spirit, Kingstowne May 3, 2009

Video: Stand by me (Playing for change)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Us-TVg40ExM>

Intro to the service: That was cool. That now famous video shows street musicians from around the world playing *Stand by me*. What was cool about it too, was the new twist on the tune given by the first musician you saw. He sang, "No matter who you are, no matter where you go in life, you're gonna need somebody to stand by you. No matter how much money you've got, or the friends you got, you're gonna need somebody to stand by you." Those words aren't in the original song. They're a good reminder, though, that while you can claim you're gonna stand on your own two feet, everyone of us has times when we need somebody to stand with us. I'm not too proud to confess it. I feel like that more and more these days. No matter where I go or what I do, I want somebody to stand by me, and not just anybody, I need somebody named Jesus to stand by me. Oh it may be hard to see him at times, but I know he's there just the same. And it may be hard to hear his voice, but I've known his comfort and guidance so often before. It's not that Jesus brings something more to life, it's not that he's a great addition to my life along with my other belongings, but that Jesus himself is worth more to me than life ...

Song: More than life

*You said to seek and I will find, I'm coming after you
You said to knock and the door will be opened,
I want to be with you
To dwell in your house, to gaze upon your beauty
To be a friend of God, Lord all of this is to me
More than life, more than breath, you are
More than I could ever hope or imagine ...*

Intro to the reading: This morning we're going to talk about the spiritual side of money. It's one of those things that is causing a lot of stress these days. Layoffs, cut backs, down markets and losses in 401Ks have everyone feeling worried. As I said last week, worry and fear are spiritual issues no matter what their cause. Last week I also told you that in place of fear, Christ Followers are to live with a joy that comes from confidence. Confidence here means living with faith, but not just any faith, it's a faith in the power of God's presence. That's also the key to understanding how to handle your money my friends. Don't forget the solution to fears is confidence in God's presence.

Only when it comes to God and money there seem to be two different really big mistakes people make. The first is to think that anytime we talk about money in church, it's to get you to give more. Well, you are always welcome to give, or to give more, but that's not what we're talking about here. The other mistake is to think that when Jesus promises fullness of life and complete joy he's talking about you having a life of prosperity. Yes there are places in the Bible that could lead you to think that way. For instance we're told:

Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything your land produces. Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with the finest wine. (Proverbs 3:9-10 NLT)

I believe when you honor God, he honors you. But wait. It would be a mistake to think of this as a "you rub my back and I'll rub yours, Lord" kind of deal. Remember how Christians make such a big deal out of grace? The amazing thing about grace is God gives it to you before you can earn it or deserve it. In other words, God's rubbing your back long before you respond, he's giving you good things before you remember to give any back to him. It's just that a life that honors God will open the way to receive more blessings from God.

The mistake here is to think God's in the investment business, where you invest in him and in return he'll make you rich. That's called the Prosperity Gospel. A lot of well dressed folk on TV teach this. Tune in or read Joel Olsteen, Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer and Kenneth Copeland. You'll hear that God is ready to bless you with good health and money if you believe enough or send a donation. No doubt some of the things these people say are good and wholesome, but not this view of money. As one critic put it so plainly: "Any gospel that cannot be preached in a third-world country is not the True Gospel of Jesus Christ." [David Jeremiah] What does it say to the majority of Christ Followers in this world, who live without the basic daily essentials like medical assistance, clean water, safe housing, let alone Starbucks and an internet connection, that if they were only more faithful, like us, they'd be more prosperous, like us? That's got to be wrong.

Even this first passage in Proverbs proves the point that there's more here to understand ... only a few lines later, the author tells you that while God may bless you with prosperity, there's something far more precious than money:

Happy is the person who finds wisdom and gains understanding. For the profit of wisdom is better than sil-

ver or gold. Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. She offers you life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. She will guide you ... all her ways are satisfying. (Proverbs 3:13-17 NLT)

Happiness doesn't come from having your barns full (Remember that line because it will pop up again in a moment in something Jesus taught). No, happiness comes from wisdom, which is the term Proverbs uses for the Holy Spirit. The Bible here is telling you that having God present in your life is more valuable than having money. I'm not saying money is a bad thing. It comes in real handy when you have to pay the rent or buy food. It's a necessity. I'm not naive. All I ask is for you to do the math on this one. If you have Jesus and \$100 that's great. If you lose the \$100, well, you can work at getting it back. You still have Jesus in your life. But if you keep the \$100 and lose Jesus, what have you got left ... just some money which will soon enough be gone. The \$100 doesn't add much to knowing Jesus ... That's why what Jesus taught so long ago is still fresh and real today:

"How do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?" (Mark 8:36-37NLT)

You know I'd be a whole lot more successful and popular as a preacher if I told you that your faith would bring you everything you ever wanted. More people would come to church here if I told them that God is ready to bless you with prosperity if only you step out in faith. But I don't believe it. I also refuse to believe that Mother Theresa, Dorothy Day, St. Francis, and all the faithful folk who have lived and served throughout the centuries without much to show for it were people God refused to bless. I've met some very faithful people who had no money to speak of, and yet they lived with the enduring sense of being blessed that only comes from knowing Jesus is standing by you. So instead of the empty promise of prosperity, I want the one thing that will fill my heart and my life. Instead of praying to God, "Lord give me more", I pray, simply "Lord, give me Jesus."

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Song: Give me Jesus

*In the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise
In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus
You can have all this world, but give me Jesus
And when I am alone, and when I am alone
And when I am alone, give me Jesus
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus
You can have all this world, but give me Jesus*

*And when I come to die, and when I come to die
And when I come to die, give me Jesus
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus
You can have all this world, but give me Jesus*

Song: You are my world

*My Father, I adore you more than anything
My heart could wish for, I just want you
And Jesus, my beloved Savior everything I have
I owe to you, I owe it all to you
And angels come ... and adore you,
And we your children worship you
You are my world, you are my God
And I give all my life to you
You are my Lord, the one I love,
No one could ever take your place
And everything I have I give to you, my lord,
The one I live for, I live for you
And all my days are gifts from you I pray
I'd use them as you want me to, use them for you
And angels come ... and adore you,
And we your children worship you ...*

Multimedia: Mercedes Benz

Janis Joplin

*Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz
My friends all drive Porsches I must make amends
Worked hard all my lifetime no help from my friends
So Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz
Oh Lord, won't you buy me a color TV
Dialing for Dollars is trying to find me
I wait for delivery each day until three
So oh Lord, won't you buy me a color TV
Oh Lord, won't you buy me a night on the town
I'm counting on you, lord please don't let me down
Prove that you love me and buy the next round
Oh Lord, won't you buy me a night on the town*

Intro to the message: That was the last song Joplin recorded before her death. It's kind of funny, done as if with a smirk and a wink. The song makes fun of the kind of faith that asks God for stuff. No one in their right mind would pray to God for a color TV would they? Well, I suppose people do pray for such things. But it's not a right minded thing to do. There's a big difference between praying to God and writing to Santa Claus. With Santa you ask for goodies, and tell him you deserve them because you've been good all year. I couldn't do that with God. First of all, God sees me all year and he knows better. And second, I know better than to ask God to give me stuff, especially stuff I don't really need. We all get confused between needs and wants. There's a lot of stuff I want, a lot less stuff I really need. In between those two there's a big gray area. I don't believe it, for instance, if my daughter were to say, "Dad, I really need another video game." "Need? You sure? When I pray in the words Jesus taught, "Give us this day our daily bread" I'm asking God to provide for my daily needs. That doesn't include a color TV. I

have one of those. In fact my family has more than one of those. It's something for which we paid. It was never something about which we ever prayed.

Today's message is about making ends meet. Sort of. In the next 10 minutes I can't tell you how to balance your budget and make back all the money you lost in the market. I can tell you that when you're ready to learn some proven techniques on how to honor God with your money, how to make a realistic budget and get real-life strategies for living within your means, we will offer another Good Sense Workshop. We offered it a few times recently but they have not been popular. Well maybe next time. Good Sense made it possible for me to get out of a lot of credit card debt and sleep better at night. It works.

So instead of balancing your budget, this morning I want to talk with you about the ends you can meet. You have a choice here. You get to choose which way you want to head, to which end you want to move. You can choose to live for yourself or you can choose to live with God. You can think of your money as yours, and work at getting more, spending more and keeping more of it for yourself. Or you can try to discover to what end God blesses you with what you have. Then you can choose to use your money to make a difference, instead of letting your money get control and make you into a different kind of person. Whether you've got a lot or you're just scraping by each month, money poses the same spiritual challenge. It threatens to become our God.

So let's talk about money and the stuff it buys. You have a lot of stuff in your life. I know that because many of you have been telling me how much you need to bring in for the yard sale. And I'm right there with you. My car does not fit into my garage anymore. I get it. Compared to our brothers and sisters in underdeveloped countries, we have so much, we have so much. But there's a funny thing about our having stuff. No matter how much you have, you may want more. That's the challenge. It's not the stuff, it's wanting more. And then, the more stuff you have the more time you need to clean it, maintain it, update it and upgrade it. You may worry about it getting stolen or broken. So you end up paying to insure it. And if you have too much of your good things, you may be tempted to pay to store them. We did that for a year here at Church. We have very little storage in the building so for a while we had one of those small storage units you rent by the month. After a while though I went to the unit to pick up something and realized we were paying more a year to store the stuff than it was worth to replace. It's amazing how attached we get to our stuff ... and how easy it is to lose sight of true value.

I want you to be careful here. Your money and your stuff can change how you live. They can make a difference in your whole outlook. You may stay in a higher paying job just because you need the money to afford more stuff. You don't like the work, you may not like the people, but you figure you have to have the money. The more stuff you have may make you feel like you are better than people who have less. Stuff can also become an addiction, where the things you own start to own you. You think about them, worry about them, lust after them. If someone damages some of your stuff it may make you very angry. You

may think I'm talking about someone else here, but be honest. Your money and your stuff can really grab ahold of your life if you are not careful. I can prove it. It's almost pool season again. It's rare that an hour at my neighborhood pool will not include a conversation about home values or housing sales. It happens all the time ... because it's so easy to get caught up in your stuff, and the money it takes to buy it and keep it safe. Jesus saw this tendency in us all when he said, *"These things dominate the thoughts of most people."* [Luke 12:30 NLT] So the big question today is whether your money is making you different. How is it having an effect on you? Has having stuff become your purpose in life?

Someone asked, "Teacher, please tell my brother to divide our father's estate with me." Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that ... Beware! Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own." And he gave an illustration: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. In fact, his barns were full to overflowing. So he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store everything. And I'll sit back and say to myself, My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!' But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get it all?' Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

[Reading-

ing: Luke 12:13-21]

Jesus says, *"Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."* He's not about to play along with the guy who wanted help getting more stuff from his brother. Jesus tells him, *"Don't be greedy for what you don't have. Real life is not measured by how much we own."* We could add, it's not about what we drive or what we make.

So if there's one positive side to the current economic worries, maybe it is this. It's making us all ask whether the things we take for granted are worth taking along for the ride. Are the things we're holding onto worth it? Or are they taking a hold of our lives? Here's how you can let go and let God help:

(1) Look at money like it was a hammer. A hammer is a tool. It's only a tool. Few people lust after hammers, or lock them up in a safe. You use a hammer when you need it. The whole point of a hammer is what it can help you build. If you look at your money as a tool instead of as a possession, then you can use it when you need to, without getting attached to it. And if money is not a possession any longer (something that has to be held back) it can become a useful tool in making a difference in the lives of others (when you put it to good use). So do you see money as a possession or something you have been given for a while to use? And do you use it only for yourself?

(2) Do not set your heart on riches, or your eyes on more stuff. I called my insurance company last week to check on something in my car insurance bill. The bright and cheerful

voice on the other end of the phone said, "Well Mr. Schellenberg, I see you've been preapproved for a loan of \$50,000 for the purchase of a new car." You've got to be kidding. I asked the lady to look at my records. Could she see that the average age of the cars at my house is 9 years old. It's OK to say, "No" to your wants. I've found it's easier to just say, "No" when I remember that what I really need doesn't come from the store. I'm not going to let myself get worked up over new products I can't afford, or spend my time looking online at stuff I can't buy or don't need. Life's about more than wishing I had more. I no longer look at the ads in the Sunday paper, at least until I need to shop for something specific. I believe God offers me more fulfillment when I focus on him instead of the latest sales.

(3) Bring something to the party. It's not just a nice thing to do, it's the right thing to do. One of the laws of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy states it's a requirement for everyone to celebrate at the time of harvest ... when the barns were ready to be filled again, then everyone was to take time to throw a party. Get it? When the barns are full, you celebrate, and you share what you have with others. That's different from the guy Jesus talked about who wanted to build bigger barns. Instead of keeping it all to yourself, and in response to all God had given you, you are each to bring something of your own to the party:

Rejoice at your festival: you, your son, your daughter, your servants ... the foreigner, and the orphans and widows who live in your neighborhood. Celebrate the Feast to God ... for your God, has been blessing you in your harvest and in all your work, so make a day of it—really celebrate! All your men must appear before God, and no one is to show up in the Presence of God empty-handed; but each man must bring as much as he can manage, giving generously in response to the blessings of God, your God. [Deuteronomy 16:13-17 from The Message]

Here's how it's supposed to work: everyone comes to the party, everyone brings something, no one shows up empty handed. Because of the blessings you have received, you give back to God and you share with those in need. Be stingy and you'll forget how much you depend on the unseen hand of God to help you and provide for you. Jesus said, "Food and drink and clothing dominate the thoughts of most people, but your Father already knows your needs. He will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern." [Luke 12:30-31 NLT] It's easy to forget that God provides, and in return all he asks is for you to respond generously. Don't bring anything to the party and the next thing you know, you start thinking that car you drive actually belongs to

you, and the IRA or the 401K is all yours. It's too easy to think that it's all yours, whatever it is ... but I can do the math on that one too. I can prove it's not all yours, even the money in your pocket this morning. It's not yours because in the end you can't take it with you. Your hold on your stuff is temporary. But God's hold on you can be eternal, if you don't let your stuff get in the way.

That one realization should be enough to help you see there's a different end for your money, there's a different use for it. God has given you the ability to earn and save so you can take care of your own business, yes, but also so you can make a difference with your money. Don't let your money (or lack of money) sour your heart and fill you with worries. For then it will make you into something different from what God wants for you. In our closing song you'll hear these words: "Sometimes I feel disappointed by the way I spend my time ... How can I further your kingdom when I'm so wrapped up in mine. And though I'm living the good life, can my life be something great?" The answer is, "Yes". Your life can become something great when that greatness gets measured by how much you've done for others and how well you have honored God with all that you have, not what you have done for yourself. For really, "How do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?" (Mark 8:36-37NLT)

Song: In the blink of an eye

*You put me here for a reason, you have a mission for me
You knew my name and you called it
Long before I learned to breathe
Sometimes I feel disappointed by the way I spend my time
How can I further your kingdom
When I'm so wrapped up in mine
In a blink of an eye that is when
I'll be closer to you than I've ever been
Time will fly, but until then
I'll embrace every moment I'm given
There's a reason I'm alive for a blink of an eye
And though I'm living a good life
Can my life be something great?
I have to answer the question before it's too late ... 'cause
In a blink of an eye that is when
I'll be closer to you than I've ever been
Time will fly, but until then
I'll embrace every moment I'm given
There's a reason I'm alive for a blink of an eye
If I give the very best of me that becomes my legacy
So tell me what am I waiting for? What am I waiting for?*