

There was once a man selling balloons in Central Park in New York City. Every-once-in-a-while, when business got slow, he would simply release a balloon and let it float up into the air. That would usually get a small crowd gathering around him to buy more balloons.

He sold balloons back in a day that the civil rights movement was just getting started. A little African American boy was watching this whole scene. Finally, he worked up the courage to go talk to this man.

He walked up and said, "Mister, I noticed that you have all kinds of balloon colors, but you don't have any black balloons. I was wondering if you had a black balloon, would it go up into the air too?"

The man looked down at that boy and wisely said, "Son, let me tell you something. It's not the color of the balloon that makes it go up. No, it's actually what is inside the balloon that makes it go up in the air."

I love that story. Because the man selling balloons is absolutely right. It is not the outside of any us that shapes us. It is what is on the inside of us that matters. It is our attitude that matters.

What is your attitude toward life? Are you cynical? Are you hopeful? What is your attitude toward God? Do you believe God is out there? Do you believe God cares? Do you trust God to provide for you?

Our attitude matters. Our attitude matters in just about everything we do and in just about everything we face. Our attitude matters, even when it comes to issues of faith.

Today we are beginning a new sermon series called *Blessed Beyond Expectation*. In this series we are going to talk about money

and possessions. We are going to talk about attitudes. I know that one of the prevailing thoughts out there is that all the church cares about or talks about is money. This is usually said in a pejorative way, putting down the church. It is usually meant to mean that the church cares more about money than they do about me.

Personally, I don't believe that to be true. Now, let me also say that I believe that we in the church haven't always talked about money well. We have tried to use guilt to induce people into giving more. That just doesn't work. It causes people to feel used, angry and resentful. So, I can actually understand the backlash.

But I want to tell you that I believe it is so important for us to talk about money and about our attitudes toward money, because of how those attitudes can get in the way of our living faith. If we are not careful, our attitudes toward money and possessions can actually stop us from connecting with God. If we are not careful our attitudes toward money and possessions can actually stunt our growth in faith. For me, it is so important for us to talk about money and about our attitudes toward possessions, so we can actually use them to help us connect with God and grow in faith.

In our scripture for today, Jesus understands that we have many worries and fears in life. *"So, I tell you, don't worry about everyday life - whether you have enough food to eat or clothes to wear. For life consists of much more than food and clothing . . . Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not!"*

When was the last time you worried about food, clothing, shelter or about having enough? What did it do for you?

Sometimes our worrying motivates us to action, to go out and make more money; to re-evaluate our spending habits. But, if we don't learn from our worrying, by adjusting our attitudes toward money for the long haul, we simply work to avert one crisis. Then when life goes

well, we forget what we learned until the next crisis causes us to worry about finances, and we repeat the process. Worrying about finances, without changing our attitude only produces a short term fix.

Jesus goes on to say, *"Look at the flowers of the field. They are so beautiful. Yet even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. If God so cares for the flowers of the field, won't God care for you? Of Course, because God already knows your needs. God will give you all you need from day to day, if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern."*

Jesus' invitation to deal with our worrying is to get us to understand that we can trust God. The whole idea behind talking about money is to get us to take a look at our attitudes toward money, and to get us to ask ourselves, how can I show my love for God, my trust in God, through what I give back to God?

Many of you know that Debbie and I give a tithe to God. We give back 10% of what I make to God and to the work of the church. This is a commitment we have made as a couple. Now, many of you here might say, "Well, of course Scott, you have to do that. You are a pastor."

I want to tell you that I have not always done this. In fact, it wasn't until one of the most traumatic times in my life that I made a commitment to tithe. It was right after I had gone through a divorce from my first wife.

My bills were high (or so it seemed). They were exacerbated by also paying a lawyer, and by paying child-support and spousal support. In fact, for most of the first year following the divorce, after all the support I was paying, I was actually getting about 45% of my take home pay.

When I got done paying my bills and commitments, I didn't have much money to live on. I suspect that a lot of people would have said to me, "I understand if you can't give back to God through the ministry of the church. You don't have anything to live on." I faced many money fears and anxieties during that first year.

But I had made a commitment to support my children. I was going to do that. I had made a commitment to pay my bills and get out from under debt, and I have done that (and continue to). I also made a conscious commitment to say, the most important relationship in my life is the one I have with God. I will show that through taking time regularly with God and by making a commitment to tithe, as a concrete way to show my love for God.

What I discovered during that time is that God was there. God provided for me. I experienced the presence of God in way that was real and powerful and it has shaped my life profoundly.

Debbie and I are committed to tithing, because it has helped us experience the presence of God better than anything else. It has helped us to understand who we depend on for life.

So, I want us to talk about money and about our attitudes toward money, so that you can look at your life and honestly say to yourself, I want to trust God with my life. I want to put my money where my faith is. What I really want is I want you to experience the profound presence of God that I have experienced, because of a commitment to tithing.

Our attitudes really do matter. Are you willing to trust God with your life? With your money? May God help us.

Amen