Wade Street Church 22.10.17 am

"THE LOVE OF MONEY"

1 Timothy 6:3-21

I've been looking at and thinking about this passage for a while now and then a couple of things came my way which helped me see that it really is a passage worth talking about at the moment – although the issues it raises are, like most of the stuff we read in the Bible, relevant at pretty well any time. I hope it doesn't descend into a rant, and I hope very much we can see it in the context of other passages we've been considering in recent months.

The first little thought that came my way was to do with a passing reference in an article I was reading to *"the men of Issachar"*. That probably means about as much to you as it meant to me when I first spotted it, but I followed up the reference and ended up in *1 Chronicles 12*. That's probably not a book you delve into very much. It's in the Old Testament and is a version of the history that we find in the other books of the Bible from *Genesis* through to *2 Kings*. The book begins with a few chapters of names and genealogies, so many people don't really get much into it. In chapter 12, though, King David is assembling an army to challenge Saul. Again, it's really list of names of people and clans, the warriors and others who came to join David at Hebron.

But there are little comments in many of the verses as to what such and such a group could contribute to the overall war effort – some are simply armed or *"ready for battle"*. Others are conspicuous by their loyalty or their knowledge of particular weaponry. But the men of Issachar are noted not for their skill in battle particularly (although that is no doubt taken as read), but because they *"understood the times and knew what Israel should do"*. These were people who were well acquainted with current affairs and were able to apply that knowledge to the task before them. They were able to set what they were doing for God and their faith in him in a social, cultural and political context.

Now that is vitally important for us still today. Yes, we believe the word of God is unchanging, our faith if fixed, our God and his overall plan for his creation are consistent. But we need to see how that eternal, unchanging nature of God and his purposes fits into the situation in which find ourselves. How do we apply the lessons of God's word to our contemporary life in a rich, western, liberal democracy today? What does God's word have to say to our situation and how are we to express that in our own daily lives? John Stott used to quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer (I think it was) who said that the Christian preacher should prepare his sermon with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. What we have in this book needs to make a difference in our world here and now.

And we need to be aware of what is happening around us – critically aware – because it is so easy simply to be swept along with what is being said by politicians, in the media and in the public square. We need

to measure what is being promoted, legislated for, advertised, imposed on us against the things we read in here. Are we just going with the crowd or should we be standing up and saying something? Should we live our lives according to what we read in the Bible or what we read in the *Guardian* or *Daily Mail*? We need to be people who *"understand the times"*.

The second thing that happened was at an event put on by Pathway, the local charity that does such an amazing work with people who have encountered or who are fleeing from domestic abuse and, in some cases, sexual abuse. They are doing a wonderful job on very slender resources and three women spoke very movingly at this event about their experiences and how Pathway have helped them. What I'm about to say is in no way critical of Pathway – let me make that very clear.

The keynote speaker at the event was the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Staffordshire, a successful businesswoman and a clearly very able and gifted lady. She talked about what the police are doing about this issue of domestic abuse and violence and talked about a scheme to recruit "Workplace Champions", employees who could raise the profile of this issue in businesses and put some strategies in place to counter it. All very good stuff, I'm sure you'll agree. But then she went on to say why this is such a good idea: because it makes good business sense. Not because domestic abuse is wrong, a stain on our society. Not because domestic abuse is immoral in and of itself. Not because it is degrading and strips people of their dignity and their humanity. But because it makes good business sense.

Now, if you are starting to think about *"understanding the times"*, that is a very revealing perspective on one particular issue. And that is not the only issue in which good business sense, or sound financial planning, or good fiscal discipline seems to be – appropriately enough – the bottom line. In fact, it seems that pretty well every issue these days comes down to this – Brexit, social housing, public safety, personal lifestyle, even church politics: all driven by money above everything else. Of course, we need money and we need to be sensible and careful about what we do with it. But we also need to heed Paul's words to his young pastor friend, Timothy, some of which we've just heard.

From what we can make out from other parts of the New Testament and reading between the lines in these two letters that Paul writes to Timothy, he is a young man who is just starting out in ministry. Everything is new – not just for him but for the people over whom he is assuming pastoral charge. He needs help, wisdom, guidance, advice – and that is what Paul is offering him in these letters. Many people will tell you that the three biggest temptations that we face – and which are especially experienced by leaders in general and Christian leaders in particular – are money, sex and power. In the passage we heard, Paul is dealing with the issue of money. I don't say "problem" of money, because, as we've said, money is a vital part of our life: it's what we do with it, our attitude to it that is important.

You see, Paul is anxious that Timothy should be aware of the perils and dangers that come with an over-emphasis on wealth and riches. What we read here goes back to Jesus' maxim that *"you cannot serve both God and Mammon"*. In fact, there's a very strong echo here of Jesus' words in *The Sermon on the Mount* where he teaches about reliance on God rather than anxiety about money (*Matthew 6:19-34*). It has always been an issue for people. Look at what the Preacher writes in *Ecclesiastes 5:10,11*:

Whoever loves money never has enough;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.
This too is meaningless.
As goods increase,
so do those who consume them.
And what benefit are they to the owners
except to feast their eyes on them?

And clearly this is still something that affects us today – in the Church as much as in the wider culture. Think of the Prosperity Gospel, the opulence of some of the superstar preachers, the money poured into church buildings in some places. Just think of the ways in which many people see becoming a Christian as a way to a wealthier life – godliness as a means to financial gain: the same as everyone else, really, but we pray to get it quicker and more easily.

Money is at the heart of all we do. Our society would collapse without it. Life could not continue in any meaningful way. We have to accept that. And our economic activity is now so complex and interwoven that we find ourselves completely caught up in it. We cannot simply opt out, especially if we have responsibility for others. But our attitude to it has an effect on how we live the rest of our lives and, as we are saying so often, it's our attitudes that are key to the way we live as Christians. The key sentence in this passage is in *v10* – a much misquoted verse. *"The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil"*. Money's not wrong in and of itself – it's the ***love*** of it that is the problem. It's when it is your sole motivating factor that it starts to cause problems, when it assumes the stature of an idol, when it the first principle and the last word in any situation. So you cannot disassociate your economic affairs from your social ethics. The importance you give to money and wealth will have a powerful effect on the way you order your society.

How does that work out, then? Well, let's have a quick look at our own situation. I have been grappling with trying to understand the times for a while now and it seems to me that the society we are living in has been shaped by a particular attitude to money, a *"love of money"*. In the latter part of the 20th century Britain (and the USA and other countries) adopted a particular economic model. I'm not an economist (when Alan Storkey was writing his book *Transforming Economics* in the early 1980s, he gave me a copy of the manuscript to read, which I was quite flattered by: when I gave it back to him he said he'd given it to me because if could understand it then anyone could!), but from what I've read (and, indeed, seen) this

was very much based on the work of people like Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of economics. Friedman actually won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1976 for his research on consumption analysis, monetary history and theory, and the complexity of stabilization policy. (Don't worry: we're not going down the road of explaining all that this morning!) The thing to note is that this particular set of ideas relied on creating a wholly individualistic society. As it was driven by competition and by everyone's desire to do the best for themselves – usually at the expense of other people – then you needed a culture in which it was effectively everyone for himself (or herself).

So began the dismantling of anything that worked against that idea, and the effect of it in parts of Latin America and South East Asia led to some very bloody consequences. In our own situation laws were liberalised to champion individual freedom, to let loose things that had been held in check up until then by legislation, convention and consensus. Of course, people have always been selfish. There have always been temptations for us all to do our own thing at the expense of others, but there were generally agreed limits to what was appropriate. Now, to follow the economic future that was being held before us, we needed to introduce competition on an almost personal level. Collectivity was demonised – one of the reasons for the assault on such things as trades unions. Council housing – a means of helping everyone to a decent place to live – was sold off so that everyone had a personal, individual piece of property. Charities and the like had to compete against each other for the right to operate. There was the advent of what was called *"trickle down theory"* in which the wealthy were encouraged to become even wealthier in the ultimately vain hope that their wealth would somehow trickle down to the poorer people below – an idea which didn't take into account humanity's innate selfishness. And we heard the oft-quoted slogan that *"There is no such thing a society"*.

Now that all has an effect on our shared moral consensus. The love of money that drove that economic idea ends up opening up all kinds of other things – it becomes *"the root of all kinds of evil"*. That emphasis on individualism opens up all kinds of other cans of worms as the restraints of the law and the agreed consensus of past decades are removed. You can see it in the astonishing rise in consumer debt. Credit controls were removed as part of this so that everyone could have what they wanted when they wanted it, and we can now see the devastation that has caused to many people's lives, as well as to the global economy in the great financial crash.

You can see it in a kind of social Darwinianism as increasingly competitive attitudes mean that the weakest simply go to the wall, the poorest are gradually shut off from any access to wealth at all. In the end the weak and feckless are left to fend for themselves and we have seen the rise of foodbanks, rough sleepers and the like. Crime also rises as those who have little want a slice of the plenty that so many others seem to have.

And you see it in the small things – when you offer a visitor a cup of tea they tell you that they have their own tea bag in their handbag, thank you. ("I don't want yours: I want mine.") I'm stepping on dangerous ground here, I know, but I'd suggest that the apparent rise in people wanting to define their own gender or indulge their own sexual appetites in any way at all are also symptoms of a freewheeling individualism. From teabags to transgenderism, from sexuality to social media, individualism and self-interest are lurking in the background – and tacitly encouraged in order to drive the economy. The love of money on a nationwide scale leads to all kinds of things happening that are not what we really wanted and not, I believe, what God wants.

And that's why we find yet another of these big "But"s that are scattered throughout the Bible. It's there at the beginning of *v11 – "**But you**, man of God, woman of God, flee from all this ..."* The people of God, the followers of Jesus are to disassociate themselves from all this. Of course, as we've already said several times, we can't disassociate ourselves from money: life would become almost impossible. But we can flee from the love of money, which, as Paul says, has caused some people to wander from the faith. And we can try to disassociate ourselves from the rampant individualism which goes with it all.

How? Well, Paul tells Timothy to *"pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."* It's another of Paul's lists and bears some striking resemblances to the *Fruit of the Spirit* which we recently thought about. Stick to living God's way, he says, and don't get enticed away by things that are ultimately unfulfilling and unhelpful. Look at what he says in *vv17-19*.

Keep your focus on Jesus – he's what really matters – and don't forget your commitment to him and to his teachings. Hold on to your confession of Christ and try day by day to follow his ways. Look at the Bible and look at the world – try to understand the times and see if what you are being encouraged (or, indeed, tempted) to do fits in with what God asks of you in his word. There's an awful lot more that could be said, but we've run out of time this morning – maybe there's a series in all this somewhere. If you want to follow it up, go along to a homegroup and join the discussion, but please do not accept all that is happening around you uncritically and keep asking God for his help to live your life in the pursuit of *"righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."*

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In *1 Chronicles 12* King David is assembling an army to challenge Saul. The men of Issachar (*v32*) are noted not for their skill in battle particularly (although that is no doubt taken as read), but because they *"understood the times and knew what Israel should do"*. These were people who were well acquainted with current affairs and were able to apply that knowledge to the task before them. They were able to set what they were doing for God and their faith in him in a social, cultural and political context.

Now that is vitally important for us still today. Yes, we believe the word of God is unchanging, our faith if fixed, our God and his overall plan for his creation are consistent. But we need to see how that eternal, unchanging nature of God and his purposes fits into our situation. And we need to be aware of what is happening around us – critically aware – because it is so easy simply to be swept along.

For many issues money seems to be the bottom line. In fact, it seems that pretty well every issue these days comes down to this. Of course, we need money and we need to be sensible and careful about what we do with it. But we also need to heed Paul's words to Timothy. Paul is anxious that Timothy should be aware of the perils and dangers that come with an over-emphasis on wealth and riches. What we read here goes back to Jesus' maxim that *"you cannot serve both God and Mammon".* (Look also at *Matthew 6:19-34* and *Ecclesiastes 5:10,11*)

Money is at the heart of all we do. But our attitude to it has an effect on how we live the rest of our lives. The key sentence in this passage is in *v10* – *"The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil"*. Money's not wrong in and of itself – it's the ***love*** of it that is the problem. It's when it is your sole motivating factor that it starts to cause problems. So you cannot disassociate your economic affairs from your social ethics. The importance you give to money and wealth will have a powerful effect on the way you order your society.

Our own society's economic model is built on individualism and that has an effect on our shared moral consensus. The love of money that drove that economic idea ends up opening up all kinds of other things – it becomes *"the root of all kinds of evil".* That emphasis on individualism opens up all kinds of other cans of worms as the restraints of the law and the agreed consensus of past decades are removed. From teabags to transgenderism, from sexuality to social media, individualism and self-interest are lurking in the background – and tacitly encouraged in order to drive the economy. The love of money on a nationwide scale leads to all kinds of things happening that are not what we really wanted and not, I believe, what God wants.

*"**But you**, man of God, woman of God, flee from all this …"* The people of God, the followers of Jesus are to disassociate themselves from all this. Paul tells Timothy to *"pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."* Keep your focus on Jesus – he's what really matters – and don't forget your commitment to him and to his teachings. Look at the Bible and look at the world – try to understand the times and see if what you are being encouraged (or, indeed, tempted) to do fits in with what God asks of you in his word.

Questions for discussion

1) What do you understand by *"understanding the times"*? Why is it important? How can we do it?

2) Do you think our society has an overemphasis on money? If so, in what ways is it shown?

3) Why do you think a love of money causes people to *"wander from the faith"*? How can we prevent that happening in our own lives?

4) Is there anything wrong with individualism? How can we counter it?