

**Stewardship of money**  
**7<sup>th</sup> February**  
**Shirley Williams**

Malachi 3:6-12, Mark 14:1-10

What a contrast we have in our readings. In Malachi we have a strong sense of the disapproval of God v 9 you are under a curse the whole nation of you because you are robbing me. On the other hand in Mark Jesus shows his approval of the woman who anoints him with perfume – he says ‘she has done a beautiful thing to me’ and later ‘wherever the gospel is preached what she has done will be told in memory of her.’ It set me thinking about what is at the root of the differing reactions and I think it’s the heart.

Lets look a bit more deeply at what God is saying through Malachi. The people were accused of robbing God because they were holding back from giving their full tithe. From the earliest times God’s people had been reminded of their responsibilities as stewards of all that he had given them and along with the ten commandments they had been given instructions about the way they were to live. This included giving a tenth of their grain crops and one in ten of their new born animals to support the ministry of the priests – in other words back to God. You can imagine in the early days this might have been given joyfully and thankfully from their hearts in response to God bringing them out of slavery and into the promised land. But somewhere along the line this response from the heart was taken over by the feeling that this was a rather irksome rule and maybe they could cut corners a bit by giving less. Hence the warning that they needed to return to him.

In Mark we have the opposite happening- the woman is prompted to give a hugely generous and lavish gift to Jesus by pouring this perfume on his head – perfume worth a more than a year’s wages. You might feel some sympathy with the disciples when they say that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor – wasn’t Jesus always talking about

the poor. But no, Jesus commended her. Why? I think because he saw into her heart and recognised that God was working in her. She probably wouldn't have been able to express it but somehow she was beginning to understand what Jesus mission was all about and she had been prompted to respond in this generous way. Through her actions Jesus was also able to point to the time which was shortly coming when he was to die and his body would be anointed for burial. An act of overwhelming and undeserved generosity on the part of God which at this time neither the woman nor the disciples could really understand.

Of course we can look at both passages from the perspective of a different time in history. We know that God gave in son to die on the cross for us and we know the meaning of the resurrection for our lives into eternity and surely that prompts a response from us – but will it be a response from the heart like the woman or one which holds something back like the people of God in Malachi?

Surely our response to such a generous gift is to be equally lavish. I came across this quote the other day it appealed to me because its by CT Studd who not only founded the Worldwide evangelisation Crusade but he was also a test cricketer. He said 'if Christ be God and gave himself for me, then no sacrifice that I might make for him can ever be too great.'

I think the starting point is offering our praise and worship from our hearts to God. When we looked at God in my worship before Advent we saw that that doesn't just mean our worship service on Sunday but offering our whole lives as worship to him. In Romans Paul refers to it as offering ourselves as living sacrifices. God delights in that offering of ourselves and as we respond to him from our hearts we learn more and more about what it means to live for him each day. Part of that deepening relationship is learning what it means to be good stewards of all that he has given us. Just as the people of God in Malachi were stewards of God's resources in their time, we are the stewards of God's resources for 2010.

Of course this has been our focus over the last couple of weeks – earth, time, talents and we have reflected on how we can use these gifts wisely for the benefit of God's kingdom. So today it's my turn to talk about the stewardship of money! What does that mean?

Firstly we need to have the right attitude. Jesus warned that you cannot serve God and money. In other words a pursuit of more and more money for its own sake will make money our god and will lose our focus on his will for our lives. That doesn't mean though that we are all called to live by faith. For most of us we do need to seek an income in order to provide for ourselves – eg Paul's message to the Thessalonians. Being good stewards means considering how we use that money – very similar to time.

As with time we also need to consider what we can give to God's ministry and mission in 2010. This is nothing new. In OT times as we saw in Malachi there was an instruction to give a tithe to the priests who had no land of their own so it supported their ministry in the temple. In the NT there was no explicit mention of the tithe but we can see from Acts and Paul's letters that there was an expectation that members of the early church would share their resources, give for the needs of the poor and also to support those who were going out in mission eg 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey from Philippians. So today it's down to us – it is our responsibility to be good stewards of money so that we can provide for the ministry of the church here and now. The money does not come from anywhere else unlike for example the Church in Sweden where part of taxation goes to the church.

What does that mean – we have to pay our share to Salisbury, we need to pay for this building – last week we celebrated 25 years and we also looked to the future. We might say the church isn't about buildings but if you think about all that goes on here during the week this building is central to our mission and we are very privileged to have it. Bills going up. £300 a month needed. Also giving away to the needs of others.

What does that mean for each one of us as individuals? There are some things its not:

Not about a club – you can't belong if you don't pay- you are welcome here whatever

Not about a guilt trip

Not about boasting

Not about comparing or measuring against someone else.

What it is about is the heart. Verse **Each one must give as he has decided in his heart. (2 Cor 9 v 7)**

I think its about each one of us having that secret but honest conversation with God in our hearts and asking him what it is right for us to give. For some people a tithe is appropriate, for others that is something to aspire to, some can give more. Important to have that time of reflection from time to time to see if we need to make changes.

This is something we are being encouraged to do in preparation for next week when we have an opportunity to make a love offering to God.

You may want to offer your time, your talents or money –or yourself I would encourage you to try to take some time out of your week to allow God to prompt you just as he did the woman with the jar of perfume. As Jesus said the woman's actions are remembered wherever the gospel is preached. Who knows where your love offering might lead but isn't exciting to think about what might happen if we follow God's prompting.