

Sermon for Sunday, August 3, 1975, by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"NARROW-MINDED JESUS"
St. Matthew 5:27-30; 6:19-34

Text: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

St. Matthew 6:21

The dictionary will tell you that the word "narrow-minded" means "lacking breadth of view or sympathy." It goes on to say that narrow-mindedness is synonymous with intolerance. Most of us don't like to be thought of as being narrow-minded--or intolerant--or unsympathetic. For example, if you expressed an opinion to me and I said to you, "Well, you certainly are narrow-minded," you would take that as an insult. But let me suggest to you this morning that Jesus Christ was a narrow-minded man about many things. There were some things about which Jesus was most intolerant. There were some things about which our Lord was totally lacking in sympathy.

Take, for example, the abuse of the temple in Jerusalem. People came from all over the world to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. But the priests had a rule. It was that only local Jewish coins were acceptable in the temple. So, since the people brought money from every nation under the sun, there was a lucrative business going on inside the temple to change those foreign coins into Jewish money. The money changers made a pretty penny. Jesus was very intolerant about that. Once he took a whip and drove the money changers out of the temple and told them in no uncertain, narrow-minded terms that his father's house was to be called a house of prayer.

Or take the business of sexual immorality. We live in a permissive society today. Ann Landers had a letter in her column the other day from a lady who wanted to marry the man she was living with but was afraid the notice of the marriage licensee would get in the papers and the grandchildren would find out their grandparents had never been married. Now, when it came to that, Jesus was very narrow-minded. He not only said sexual immorality was wrong, He was so intolerant that He said anyone who looked at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

One of the things Jesus was most intolerant about was a man's relationship to his money. I don't know if you are aware of this or not, but Jesus talks more about money in the New Testament than any other subject. And if you read what he says about money, you will discover him to be most narrow-minded. So this morning I want to talk about the narrow-mindedness of Jesus as it relates to money and suggest some of the possible reasons that He was so intolerant about a man's relationship to possessions.

One of the things money does is give us a false sense of self-sufficiency. Do you remember the parable Jesus told about the rich man whose fields brought forth plentifully? And because he had so much he began to feel self-sufficient. He decided to tear down his old barns and build newer and bigger ones. And in his self-sufficiency he said to himself, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry." But his sense of self-sufficiency was false because Jesus said that that very night, God required of him his soul. And you know, there is a sentence in that parable that I had not noticed until recently. Jesus concludes that parable by saying, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." You may have much of the world's goods this morning. As a congregation we are one of the most financially blessed of any group in St. Louis. But are you rich toward God? Every year, particularly

around income tax time, we total up what we have earned. We make out a balance sheet that shows our assets. But let me ask you, have you made out a balance sheet with God lately? What are your assets with Jesus? If you drew a check on your heavenly account, would it bounce?

In the 19th chapter of Matthew, Jesus' disciples heard Him say, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." I'm not sure exactly what that phrase means. If we take it literally, it is an exaggeration to demonstrate that people who are self-sufficient find it hard to lean on God. It is as easy for a camel to go through the eye of a needle as it is for rich people to trust Jesus and lean on God. If you feel self-sufficient, it is hard to trust the Lord. Some say that the expression has another meaning. Back in those days the gates to the city were closed at night. This was a safety precaution to keep mauraders from coming in at night. However, one of the gates had a very small door in it. People who arrived after the gates were shut could get in, but only one at a time so that the gatekeeper would not be overwhelmed. If you arrived late and you were leading a camel, you had a problem. The only way you could get your animal inside the safety of the walls was to strip him of everything, get him down on his knees, and literally push him through the tiny opening. Some say that the opening was called the eye of the needle and in His statement this was what Jesus meant. If you want to get into heaven, you have to strip yourself of everything and go through on your knees. You have to get rid of the things you have put your confidence in.

So, one of the reasons Jesus was narrow-minded about money was because it gives us a sense of false security. It can mislead us. It can cause our souls to end up in hell. A second reason Jesus was narrow-minded about money was because we begin to love it. It begins to possess our hearts. There are a lot of us here this morning, if the truth were known, and if we were really honest with ourselves, really love our money and love the things it provides for us. It is the most important thing in our lives. Jesus recognized this and He was very narrow-minded about it. Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus? He wanted to know what he needed to do to be saved. Jesus told him first that he needed to be a moral person and the young man replied that all his life he had kept the commandments. Now that is an interesting thing. Here was a morally up-right young man. He was a very religious person. He undoubtedly went to the synagogue regularly, he kept the feast days, he observed the Jewish laws. Yet, something was lacking in his life and he knew it. What was wrong? It was simple enough. His heart was in the wrong place. He loved his money more than he did the Lord. Now, notice I did not say he didn't love the Lord. He did. He was religious. He was moral. But the Lord was not first in his life because his possessions were. That is why Jesus told him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor and then he could follow Him. It wasn't that Jesus was opposed to the young man having possessions. But He was opposed in his narrow-minded way to the young man loving things more than he did the Lord. Well, it was more than the boy could handle. The Bible says he went away sorrowful because he owned an awful lot. How about you and your possessions? Are they ahead of the Lord?

If Jesus told you to rid yourself of all of your assets--and all of the things they provide for you--and follow him, could you do it? Or would you do it? You see, it isn't that Jesus is opposed to your having money and the things money provides. What He is opposed to is loving those things more than you do Him. And many of us this morning are good people. We are moral people. We are respected people. But being good isn't enough--as the rich young ruler found out. The real question is this: where is your heart? In our scripture for this morning,

Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." So, one of the reasons Jesus is narrow-minded about money is because it begins to possess our hearts and God is not first in our lives any more. If you are not sure where your heart is this morning, let me give you a simple little question that will help you answer your own question. When you open the paper in the morning, which do you read first, the Billy Graham question and answer column or the stock market report? That might give you some idea of where your heart is.

Thirdly, Jesus was narrow-minded about money because it can ruin our relationship to God. Now, the Bible tells us that all we have is a gift from God. We are simply stewards of a trust. The Bible tells us also that we should give a tenth to the Lord. Well, the truth is, when a man is being a poor steward to the Lord, it ruins his relationship to God. That's true of any sin, including the sin of the misuse of money. If a man suddenly stops coming to church, you can usually bet he has suddenly become involved in some sin. It may be cheating in his business, it may be running around on his wife, it may be because he gets behind in his commitment to the Lord. And because he feels guilty, he quits coming. He may give you all kinds of excuses and reasons as to why he isn't coming, but when the truth comes out, something has happened that makes him feel guilty so he quits coming to church. Do you remember the story of the incident when Jesus was standing by the temple treasury, and the poor widow cast in a tiny bit of money? How much she gave numerically wasn't important. What was important was she gave all she had. She was trusting in the Lord. Her relationship to God was right. That's why Jesus said she gave more than anyone else--she gave her trust to God. About this time of the year, each year Central begins to run behind financially. Why? Because we are spending our money on our vacations, taking trips, going places, doing things. Most of us catch up before the end of the year, but spiritually we are doing a bad thing. We are damaging our relationship to Jesus. We are putting fun and recreation and trips ahead of our duty to the Lord. Do you really think He blesses that? What are your priorities this summer? Is the Lord first? If not, your spiritual welfare is in jeopardy.

Jesus once said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." The truth is not always easy. It is not always pleasant. But the truth is the only thing that sets us free. And the truth is this: money can destroy our relationship to Jesus. That's why Jesus was narrow-minded about it. He wanted us to be free. As Dr. Ralph Sockman once said, "He taught that the road to fullness of life is through the narrow gate of self-discipline, through standing up to duty, through the taking up of one's cross, which means doing extra service even beyond the line of duty."

Do you want to be happy? Do you want to be free? Then your money-- a trust from the Lord--must be used properly. Mr. Foster G. McGaw of Lake Forest, Illinois, founded his company on \$34,000 of borrowed money more than fifty years ago. He is a Presbyterian and the son of a Presbyterian minister. It is reported that he has given away more than \$75,000,000 during his lifetime. Mr. McGaw said not too long ago in a speech that some 20 years ago he and his wife decided they had more money than they needed. Mrs. McGaw said, "Let's give while we live," and for over 20 years they have been doing that. In his speech, Mr. McGaw said, "If some of you have some money which you'd like to spend on buying happiness...give to somebody else. That gives the happiness." He went on to say, "If you want to do something for somebody else, this is the way to really get a kick out of life."

Money can make you feel self-sufficient so that you don't depend on the Lord. Money can put your heart in the wrong place. Money can ruin your relationship to the Lord. That's why Jesus was narrow-minded about money. But money properly used can give you a kick out of life. And money can make Central continue to function and serve the Lord well. Where your money is, there is your heart also. Where is your heart this morning?