

Group Notes 30 October 2011

Rule of Life - Treasure

Welcome - Ice Breaker

A picture is worth a thousand words... but can you describe your favourite picture in one hundred words or less? What's special about it for you? (Doesn't have to be the Mona Lisa, it can be a photo or a favourite view)

Word – 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (see also Matthew 6:19-24). You will also need the *Rule of Life – Treasure* sheet circulated with these notes.

Actually all your treasure belongs to God! Just like everything else you own. This is the last in the Rule of Life series and the same applies to all four facets of our studies:

- Time – we seek to use some of our time in study and prayer because all of it belongs to God
- Talents – we use our talents in God's service because our whole personality is His gift to us.
- Words – all our words are heard by God and known to Him, and some of them we can use to tell out His praises and share His love with others.
- Treasure – our possessions also belong to Him.

Ultimately it's all about discipleship. We allow all aspects of our lives to be shared with the Lord. Then He can use those things to change our attitudes and mould us to be more like Him. The Rule of Life should not be about legalism but about letting His grace into every part of our lives.

Question 1:

- *What makes you most aware of God's generosity towards you today?*
- *Can money really be part of worship? Or discipleship?*

A Digression on tithing. Many churches teach that tithing is obligatory for Christians. Tithing means giving 10% (tithe is old English for one tenth). The Old Testament model on which this rests means the tithe is given exclusively to support your church and its full time staff because that was the Old Testament practice – 10% of the produce of your land went to pay the priests and Levites and keep up the Temple in Jeruslaem, the daily sacrifices and other aspects of worship.

- This was closely tied to the covenant God made with the people. The land was His covenant gift to every person in Israel and the crops they grew were the sign that they shared in God's blessings. They could express their thanks for God's love and faithfulness by giving a tithe.
- So it was given to God. Not good causes – these are great things to do but they're extras. Nor on the basis of whether I think the Temple's vision is up to scratch or this year's High Priest is going to use it wisely...

Question 2:

- *What are the advantages of tithing?*
- *What about the disadvantages?*

We are not under law! You are NOT obliged to tithe in the New Testament. Our reading says it plainly in v.7: we are not to give "reluctantly or under compulsion". We may give what we have decided in our heart to give. A few pointers about this:

- If we want to make tithing a law for Christians we also have to take on other Old Testament laws: no pork, no going for walks on the Sabbath, circumcision...
- We should not suppose that we can buy God off by giving a percentage when He wants to be Lord of our whole life. That is law not grace.
- Nonetheless giving a percentage on a weekly basis is wise and helpful – see **1 Corinthians 16:2**

- There may be circumstances in which we cannot give. For example, if you are on benefits you are receiving what the government calculates is the minimum you can live on. Or perhaps you are married and share an income with someone who does not share your views on giving...

Question 3:

- *We are no longer in bondage to the law, we are free! So what value is there in looking at Old Testament principles such as tithing? Can we still learn from them?*
- *Are there circumstances where it is not appropriate to give financially?*

In the New Testament, God has not covenanted a land to us, but a kingdom! He has not covenanted a Temple but a Saviour! So our model is God's amazing love shown to us in Jesus, v.14-15.

- Our giving can make good things happen – vision is vital...
- ...but the gas bill still has to be paid!
- We have the responsibility as disciples before God to sit down and decide in prayer what He would like us to give, 2 Corinthians 9:7
- Giving is bigger than what you do with your money. It's also about giving time, energy, service, love... If you can't give in other ways, these are certainly not second best!
- Generosity is one of our five core values at St Matthew's. This generous spirit is what God most wants to teach us in giving us possessions.

Question 4:

- *What ways of giving, other than financially, can you think of? Can you think of people, at St Matthew's or elsewhere, who are doing these things?*

Final Challenge In the end Jesus says it's about our heart – "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also, Matthew 6:21. So where is your treasure? Financial security can be very illusory. As we see the world economic system in disarray we know that moth and rust are still devouring away, see Matthew 6:19. One day our souls will be required of us. We don't want to hear Jesus say, "You fool..." Instead, reflect that we are God's treasure. He so set His heart on us that He gave the best He had, His beloved Son, for us...

Question 5:

- *How can you tell whether you own your possessions or your possessions own you?*

Worship ideas for groups with no musicians.

Go back to question 1 above (*What makes you most aware of God's generosity towards you today?*) List out the things people suggest on a big piece of paper. Spend a few minutes giving thanks to God for His generosity.

Works/witness.

Last week we looked at Rule of Life – Tell. Feed back to the group how you did on last week's challenge – to tell somebody that God loves them. How did you get on?