

May 1, 2010 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Psalm 49 I Believe In God; But I Trust In Money by Andy  
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Are we at risk of being a “Practical Atheist?” In this current series we are exploring the idea that while we may say, “I believe in God,” what would the evidence reveal? Looking at how we live our lives, where we turn in moments of need, the beliefs that dominate our days, our life practices, our habits, our schedules, how we spend our money, the way we treat our spouse and our friends, do our life choices validate our claim, “I believe in God”? Like one author put it, “If you were accused of believing in God would there be enough evidence to convict you?” Today is the third in the series and if you missed the first two I encourage you to go on line and read or watch the first two in this series.

The pull in our culture toward living life as a practical atheist is maybe strongest in our area of study today. Why else would there be so many verses in the Bible that both directly and indirectly warn us to particularly watch out for this temptation.

Those who love to quantify things have discovered that approximately 20 % of the verses in the Bible deal explicitly or implicitly with money, and maybe that’s the case because there is this huge pull, regardless of our profession, there’s this huge pull for us to give verbal assent to our belief in God, but then live our day to day lives as practical atheists trusting in money!

Our words are cheap—it is our actions, the way we live our life that tells the real story.

Every new year there’s a fitness craze that usually wanes pretty fast. Then with impending swimsuit season late spring can bring another flurry of fitness enthusiasm.

I was talking with a sales person at a local gym who told me about one enthusiast who came in didn’t even tour the gym and purchased a membership and NEVER returned to use it!

A person can join a gym, tell all their friends they are into fitness, buy clothes to wear to work out, a new swimsuit to do laps. They can get the latest model of water bottle, subscribe to fitness magazines, and develop great fitness plans, but all the posturing toward fitness is irrelevant if they never get off the couch to exercise. The profession without the practice is hypocrisy.

To say something like “I Believe in God but I trust in Money” is to say my practice is a denial of my profession

This isn't a new phenomena. There are those who would like to think that this is some modern, new problem—unfortunately it has along and healthy history. And whether its just the pressure of life, providing for our families, and making ends meet, or the incessant brainwashing of our culture, this thinking easily sneaks into our lives.

Even though we've heard it said and maybe said it ourselves, “Money can't buy happiness,” I'm not sure that most of us are really sure that's true. The truth is that most of us believe, to greater and lesser degrees that money can bring happiness. Here's a little experiment I picked up from Craig Groeschel. Let's ask ourselves, “Could even just a little more money make your life better?” Most of us would say yes, you bet. That's what funds the lottery. That's what drives dreams of working hard and achieving some level of economic freedom. That's what the whole of the marketing industry is built on—if you can afford whatever I'm selling from a new car to toothpaste you'll be happier, more fulfilled, more content.

If we say “YES” in big capital letters to that question, “Could even just a little more money make your life better?” Then the contradiction is convicting. Many of us say money won't bring happiness while we apparently believe more really will!!

That's what fueled the panic as markets crashed, jobs vanished, retirement funds evaporated, and home equity values plummeted in the last months of 2008. In those months of terror and the long

aftermath of a slow economic recovery if our trust was in money our earth shook.

Some piously proclaim money to be the root of all evil, but that isn't what the Bible says. Money isn't good or evil—money is an amoral means of exchange. What Paul writes to young Timothy is that, “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” 1 Timothy 6:10

This week one of our members saw the sermon title in the Update, and he called me convinced of the importance of this topic. He talked about how he had pursued money and that while increased resources may create more options it also can create more troubles. That wealth brings with it perplexities. He is acquainted with a physician who had a successful practice and one day on the way home stopped and bought a lottery ticket and he won. Money would be plentiful now for life. He visited our member's sister's home and liked it and wanted to buy it which he did. But as time passed troubles came with the money. He had to quit the practice of medicine that he loved because now he couldn't get insurance. His wife claimed she bought the winning ticket not him and she is suing him trying to get the money. Three other lawsuits are pending as people are trying to get his money. He has a cadre of lawyers surrounding him and he can't do anything without consulting them so as to protect his resources. His life has become miserable alongside the money. It now holds him captive rather than providing freedom that he believed it would bring.

Jesus understood the draw to find security in money, to look to money to protect us, to see it as a means to prevent us from hunger and cold, to believe it can provide for us meeting our needs. And when our minds slip to believing this we may be drawn toward serving money for its pay out.

Jesus said, “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Luke 16:13

This isn't some platitude; just some nice little Jesus quote.

It is reality. It is truth delivered from the one who is the way the truth and the life. To think that we can pull it off, that we can live with a dual citizenship as loyal to the kingdom of God and loyal to money is self-deception. Hear these words of Jesus again as if for the first time and let them sink in—"We cannot serve both God and money."

And if we try there are consequences that may not just effect us but can effect the whole body of Christ.

It wasn't that long after they had escaped from Egypt that the people of Israel found themselves on the boarder of the land God had promised their forefathers. But rather than going in they were filled with fear and distrust of God and they had to go wander in the wilderness for 40 years until a whole generation of doubters died off. Now Moses too has died, and Joshua is leading them into their promised homeland.

Even though the Jordan River was at flood levels it miraculously split open and they had marched across on dry land and they pitched camp at Gilgal.

The first big hurdle to enter the land promised to them was the fortified city of Jericho with its massive walls. Inside those walls there was an ominous sense of fear, they knew the Israelites had been delivered from Egypt, they had heard about the Red Sea opening up for them. There was concern of what might happen next. But overriding those concerns was confidence in their walls, confidence in the security of the work their own hands had created. Jericho was prosperous, spiritual with devotion to their fertility God of Ashtoreth, with temple prostitution as part of their worship practice.

Jericho is 1000 feet below sea level and has palm trees and can even grow bananas—it was prosperous place with great economic viability, it was a wealthy city, and from the outside looking in the desert

wandering bunch of shepherds had no clue as how they could conquer that city.

I can imagine that as they marched over to Jericho from Gilgal a couple of miles away, and silently circled the city and then marched back to their camp that the people of Jericho on top of the wall wondered what was going on. And again each day as they silently circled the city curiosity must have been rising.

It was on the seventh day they circled seven times blew the trumpets and whether God sent an earthquake, angels to push, but the walls came tumbling down into the city and it was completely destroyed. Wow!

This insurmountable obstacle crumbled before them. It was evident to every Israelite that they had not gained the victory by their own power. The conquest had been wholly the Lord's and everything in that city was to be devoted to as a sacrifice to God.

It was a reminder, as they began to enter Canaan that they were not to fight for themselves but simply, as instruments they would execute the will of God and they were not to seek for riches or self-exultation but the glory for Jehovah their King.

The instructions were really really clear: "Do not take any of the things set apart for destruction, or you yourselves will be completely destroyed..., and you will bring trouble on all Israel. Everything made from silver, gold, bronze, or iron is sacred to the Lord and must be brought into his treasury." Joshua 6:18&19

So Jericho falls, only Rahab and her family escape to become part of Israel. With the momentum of this great victory Joshua sends some spies out to the neighboring town of Ai, and they come back with word that only 3-4, thousand troops would be needed to take Ai. "So approximately three thousand warriors were sent, but they were soundly defeated. The men of Ai chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the quarries, and they killed about thirty-six who were

retreating down the slope. The Israelites were paralyzed with fear at this turn of events, and their courage melted away.” Joshua 7:4 & 5

They were confused. Jericho’s walls fall but now little Ai beats up on them. And Joshua falls down with his face to the ground and challenges and complains to God. But God tells Joshua to get up. Israel wasn’t defeated, 36 warriors didn’t die because God can’t win their battles for them. God says the problem is that Israel has sinned. There’s secret sin in the camp. Their claim is that they believe in God but they are practical atheists because they trust in money.

The secret sin in the camp of Israel is greed. And that choice by one man effects the whole nation. That night 36 families have lost a son, a brother, a dad all because of greed.

You can read the whole story in Joshua 7. But lots are cast, some way of drawing straws among the tribes and the tribe of Judah got the short straw. Then the clan of Zerah, then the family of Zimri, and finally Achan is the last man standing.

Finally confronted with his sin Achan confesses. Not in sorrow, not in remorse, not with any change of heart but he simply admits the facts.

“I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. For I saw a beautiful robe imported from Babylon, two hundred silver coins, and a bar of gold weighing more than a pound. I wanted them so much that I took them. They are hidden in the ground beneath my tent, with the silver buried deeper than the rest.” Joshua 7:2 & 21

The morning of the seventh day as they prepared to march around Jericho if we’d asked Achan, “Do you believe in God” I’m sure he would have said yes. And a few days later as his sin is exposed if we’d asked Achan, “Do you believe in God,” I’m sure he’d have said yes. But he was for all practical purposes a practical atheist. He believed in God but trusted in money.

Covetousness is an evil of gradual development.

Achan had just wanted a little more than he had.

He was greedy with a hunger for more.

He had come to believe that if he just had a little more things would be better.

And he developed a habit of seeking security in more stuff, more wealth, more money, more possessions.

And like any habit it came to control his world.

That morning before Jericho's walls came down, He had no intent of bring disaster upon Israel, but his picture of reality, his perception of the world were controlled by the habitual focus and placing of trust in treasure and when the temptation came his habit made him an easy mark.

Listen today we aren't marching around Jericho with it's forbidden produce inside, but we are still at risk and there are direct commands we must follow. "You cannot serve God and money." Matthew 6:24

In the book Patriarchs and Prophets we find this challenging paragraph.

"Achan's sin brought disaster upon the whole nation. For one man's sin the displeasure of God will rest upon His church till the transgression is searched out and put away. The influence most to be feared by the church is not that of open opposers, infidels, and blasphemers, but of inconsistent professors of Christ. These are the ones that keep back the blessing of the God of Israel and bring weakness upon His people." Patriarchs and Prophet, p. 497

"Inconsistent professors of Christ"—maybe ones who never say but model a life that exemplifies, "I believe in God but I trust in money!"

There's no end to trusting in money. It is like a mood altering drug to which we become hardened and need more and more in order to get the same high.

Whether its just a little more in our investment account or one more shop-a-holic purchase more is never enough.

One day someone asked John D. Rockefeller, then one of the wealthiest men in the world, how much money would be enough? To which he replied, “Just a little bit more.”

That’s also what Solomon knew to be true when he wrote Ecclesiastes 1:8 “The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.” There is in the human psyche this insatiable hunger for more that can capture our hearts as it did Achans.

Achan believed the illusion that his life would be better with just a little more so he took the forbidden things.

One of the evidences that too many Christians claim to believe in God while they trust in money is the clever thing we tell ourselves. I’ll be generous when I have enough put away so I feel secure. When I get to a certain level then I’ll feel secure and can give. But as long as my security is in any other place than God and God alone real peace and a sense of safety and security will evade me, and I will feel compeled to clutch tightly to whatever I have fearful that it will be lost or taken. Maybe I don’t covet to take the devoted things as Achan did but lets be absolutely Biblical, if we hold onto all that comes to us in the way of economic blessings it is exactly the same as if we took a wedge of gold, a Babylonian robe, and some silver coins from a city dedicated to God.

Holding on to everything God allows to come to us is scripturally to rob from God!

When you and I choose to let go of some of our money, to release some of our possessions for kingdom benefit, we are swimming against the current of our American culture and even against the current of the American Church culture.

21 % of consistent American church members don’t give ANYTHING to their church—not a single cent. The best our

treasures can tell me is that here just under 30% of this congregation didn't give anything to support this church last year! And 75% of Christians give less than 2% of their income even though the Bible is clear that Christians are called to give generously as a safe guard to trusting in money. You can't read Malachi and have any doubt that a Biblical starting point, sort of a minimum is God's call to return 10%.

It's not just some Old Testament code of conduct done away with. When Pharisees were bragging to Jesus about their tithe, Jesus explained in Matthew 23:23, "You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things."

The practical atheist says I believe in God but I trust in money. Therefore I'll pass on to God leftovers. I'll buy something new for myself and give my worn out one to the church. I'll get a new larger more updated, digital compatible TV and give my old analog one to the church. I'll give even some money to God's work as long as it doesn't lower my standard of living. And the interpretation? I believe in God but I trust in money.

I don't want to be a practical atheist and I don't want you to be one either. So let me close by sharing some promises of God that can motivate us to be able to say I believe in God and I trust in God above all else.

One of my new favorite passages of scripture is 1 Samuel 14:6 here's what it says, " 'Let's go over to see those pagans,' Jonathan said to his armor bearer. 'Perhaps the Lord will help us for nothing can hinder the Lord. He can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few.' "

I love it! NOTHING can hinder the Lord. That's pretty all inclusive. And the fact that resources yours, mine, the church's, the cities, the government don't determine whether or not he wins. He can win with one or million on his side.

In Philippians 4:19 Paul promises: "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Money

doesn't meet all your needs it is God. We have needs money can't touch and God will meet ALL our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Jesus with freedom of knowing God from the inside out, said: "So don't worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern." Matthew 6:32-33

God is speaking in Isaiah 41:10 "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5

If we are believers and not theoretical or practical atheists, our trust will be in God and not in money.