



## Talking about money – is it taboo?

According to scientific studies a person speaks an average of 16,000 words a day. The more passionately interested you are in a subject, the more you will talk about it. However, there are areas in which we exercise more restraint than in others.

- What things do you talk about easily and happily?
- What topics would you rather avoid?
- What are the reasons for this?

‘You don’t talk about money, you just have it.’ Everyone knows this saying. And it’s true. Topics such as politics and finance should be avoided when going to parties, as they usually end up being controversial and kill the mood.

Even in The Salvation Army we pay heed to that. On the one hand, it is always a topical theme. On the other hand, an officer or a corps leader can cause some discomfort if he deals with issues like this in a sermon.

- What could the reason for this be?

Now, no corps officer likes to give the impression that he wants to pull money out of his people’s pockets. However, he lives by what the fellowship together supplies. Here, the principle is biblical. In the distribution of the Promised Land, all the tribes of Israel were assigned tracts of land so they could provide for themselves and their families through agriculture and livestock. Only the tribe of Levi (the priests) did not receive land. The tribe was fully released for Temple service.

- Read 5 Moses 18:1-8.

- Describe what feelings a priest may have had, when he didn’t have the opportunity to provide for his own livelihood.
- What advantages were there for the people, that the priests were released for service in God’s House?

The priests had special tasks to fulfil in God’s Temple. They were not assigned any land from God so they could devote the whole of their time to God’s service for the people. However, the people had a duty to provide for the priests financially. Something similar happens today when we pay a tithe of our income to our corps, so that the corps leaders are free for pastoral work and the ministry of the Word.

## Don’t Be Reluctant

Our reluctance to talk about money is unjustified for another reason. In the Bible the word ‘money’ appears more often than the word ‘Heaven’. Someone has calculated that the New Testament contains almost ten times as many verses relating to stewardship as verses which speak about salvation and faith. Therefore, no one would harbour the suspicion that Jesus wanted to get rich. Even his critics couldn’t suggest that about him. Jesus stands for something completely different.

- What parables or sayings of Jesus with the theme of money can you think of?
- Why does Jesus speak frequently about money?



Jesus often hits a nerve with the issue of money. If you have a lot, it is a big issue. And even those who have nothing think about it a great deal. Either way, we have to deal with it. We Christians as well. Jesus makes it very clear, when he speaks about it in Matthew 20, that we must give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. In other words: God does not need any money. But because money is part of the system of this world, into which we are sent, our dealings with it must be in order.

There is another reason why Jesus speaks about money. Money has the potential to become the biggest rival of our devotion to God. From the many discourses of Jesus, I want to look at one briefly with you. It is found in Luke 16:9-13.

*'And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.'*

*'He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?'*

*'No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon' (New King James Version).*

- How could this rivalry find expression in my life?

Today we know this (Latin) word Mammon, because Luther adopted it without translating it. It comes from the Greek/Aramaic word 'mamona', which can mean either money or possessions. It is related to the word 'aman', which means 'that in which you put your trust'. That means, I must be clear about what upholds my life. What gives me support and security? Do I trust a financial cushion more than the promises of God? Or do I believe that he will provide for me in a material way as well, as it is expressed in Psalm 23?

### **Much or Little**

I myself have had in my life sometimes more, sometimes less money. I have more money available than I need to live on and I see this as evidence of God's trust in my stewardship. In principle, he has nothing against wealth. But David urges in Psalm 62:10: *'Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.'* So I should be ready to give. What a huge responsibility! I find such times just as exciting as times of financial worries. In both situations, I can prove myself.

In any case, Jesus says that money is something rather temporary for us. That doesn't mean to say that it is unimportant. On the contrary. The way I handle money shows whether I am ready for the true, heavenly, eternal riches. So money is not just an issue for those who have lots of it. It concerns us all. And it has to do with our eternal life.

- Read Psalm 23 and note how God has provided for you in the past, when you were in the greatest need. Thank God for it now.