

Craig A. Satterlee, *Preaching and Stewardship: Proclaiming God's Invitation to Grow*. Alban, 2011. 178 pages. \$17.

This reviewer is not widely read in books on stewardship; but he has sampled enough variety of offerings on the subject to say that this book possibly takes an unusually broad and comprehensive view of the subject. Tangled together in the life of the church is a mass of threads, including a spectrum of attitudes about money in relation to matters of the spirit woven into a variety of generational cultural differences, a rainbow of views concerning what the Bible has to say about money, tension between the time it takes for people to grow spiritually and the time available to meet the immediate needs of the church, the preacher's fears about stepping on emotional landmines and appearing to be preaching in order to get paid, a history involving different ways of supporting the church financially and of homiletical content, rhetorical strategies, expectations, and effectiveness. This book takes us a long way down the path of identifying and disentangling this wad of threads, with the result that as preachers we may be able to get a better grip on each in relation to the others and be clearer about what we can expect our stewardship preaching to accomplish and how best to go about it.

For preachers the Bible is the keystone holding up the homiletical arch. The author of this book does not offer a systematic survey of what the Bible has to say about money. He rather points to the variety of ways the Bible speaks about money and the possessions it can buy, including its importance to God, its potential for idolatry and enjoyment and abuse, and the different ways people have tried to be faithful in using it. He brings these riches to light throughout his presentation as he leads us through a consideration of a series of questions raised by the preaching task in relation to a tension-saturated listener context.

Chapter 1, "What Do We Mean by *Stewardship*?" is a key chapter. In it the author shows how "stewardship" as a voluntary practice in relation to money was a concept invented by the church to meet its practical need. The term in Biblical Greek often translated "stewardship" can be stretched to include everything from money to the entire enterprise of Christian living, thus potentially muddying the waters concerning what the preacher might be talking about. If we narrow the definition for practical purposes to mean the way Christians use money, as Satterlee does in this book, it is best to see clearly that there is no single, Biblically authorized practice, and that while there are passages that command particular practices, these must be viewed in relation to other passages that commend other practices. In chapter 2, "Why Should We Grow in Giving?" Satterlee commends putting the focus on God and the Good News, not on fundraising. In chapter 3, "What Does the Bible Say?" the author notes that "as with so many subjects, the church in North America historically combed the Scriptures to find a biblical basis for what it wanted or needed to do to generate money for the church, as Christians all over the world have done throughout the church's history." Given the fact that there is no single Biblical practice, Satterlee enumerates six guidelines for how we use the Bible, including putting God's promise before God's commands, naming all the Biblical approaches, standing with God's people in their struggles and untangling biblical perspectives.

Satterlee then devotes chapters 4, 5, and 6 to how, why, and what we give (44). Chapter 7 promises to stir the preacher's soul by addressing the critical question, "Why Is This Sermon So Hard?" He names the demons that stop our ears and tie our tongues when it comes to money in the church. Included in the naming are the different demons that reside in different age groups present in today's church. But having named the demons, the preacher is in a position to begin addressing the spiritual issues that Satterlee argues are the first concern when it comes to the

sermon. Here is where the principle of standing with the congregation becomes vital. So also does the observation that spiritual growth happens in small conversions encouraged by a consistent approach over a long period of time. This approach to preaching does not take the place of fundraising activities. In the final chapter, “What Else Can We Do?” Satterlee identifies and comments on a number of approaches to raising money common in churches, and they are of vital importance. But Satterlee is clear: the purpose of the sermon is not fundraising. The sermon lays the foundation for people’s spiritual responses to fundraising, which at the same time constitute the reason we raise funds for the church in the first place.

Throughout these chapters the Bible is a consistent ingredient, called for time after time in relation to the riot of ideas and attitudes that have been generated over the centuries of the church’s daily living and reflection. While people might like to think that studying the Bible can clarify what God expects of us in relation to our use of money, our interpretation of particular passages must be a process of continual negotiation between one text and a variety of other texts, on the one hand, and the shifting needs and attitudes of churches and church members, on the other.

Nevertheless, Satterlee does not leave us tossed about in a sea of turbulent postmodern choices. A few things he advocates very strongly. First, the sermon is fundamentally about what God is doing in our lives and in our world. Anything we say about our use of money must be clearly articulated as a response to the Good News of God’s redemptive work. Second, preaching about money is best directed at long-term spiritual growth of the listeners rather than at radical changes in practice to meet immediate financial needs of the church. This means many sermons touching on the subject of money through the year, like a steady diet of bites of a particular food group to be chewed and balanced with bites from other food groups, as the texts for the day from time to time address it. Third, this does not mean that preachers cannot speak concretely about how the listeners might change their behavior; but it does mean that the listeners must be offered the variety of responses exemplified in the Bible, and that these must be commended as possible and freely chosen responses to the work of God in the listeners’ lives and in the world arising from gratitude and love. What is more, and this is the fourth clear recommendation, the concrete ways we may respond to God must be offered in a context of naming the struggles we may have in responding, struggles the preacher shares, struggles with competing powers vying for our loyalty, struggles with contradictions between what we believe and how we behave.

It is of some comfort to this preacher that much of the fear of preaching about money arises from unrealistic expectations of what our preaching should accomplish. Research shows that very, very few Christians respond to preaching about money after the manner of Zacchaeus. If we begin knowing that such a response will be rare if at all, we can focus on the goal of spiritual growth that happens gradually over a long period of time and that requires negotiation with a host of obstacles. And we can found our listeners’ spiritual growth on the Good News of what God is doing to transform us, on the call to trust God to accomplish in us more than either we desire or deserve, and on our freedom to respond in whatever way we are able at any given time in our journey. This approach will surely be less offensive, because it is more sympathetic and helpful and encouraging.

The views developed in this book cry out for conscious reflection on how they relate to our own personal experience. Satterlee issues a clear invitation to such reflection by formulating a list of study questions at the end of each chapter. Since money is an issue not only for preachers but for the entire congregation, and indeed an issue not only for Christians as people of faith but as participants in a culture that shapes our spiritual lives as powerfully as does our faith,

this book longs to be put in the hands of the leaders and other members of the church as an invitation to a process of communal reflection. The clarity of Satterlee's writing and the practical application of what he develops for the whole congregation makes it eminently readable for any who would take up its invitation to conversation.

Adam Gilbert Bartholomew, Mount Vernon, New York