

## The Case of the Mysterious \$4.54

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John 6:7-9

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Tuesday morning my Boss bought me breakfast. Really! God bought me breakfast this past Tuesday. I was meeting with some pastors from the area for a time of devotion and prayer when it suddenly occurred to me that God had just purchased my meal. No, He didn't miraculously speak a blessing on my plate so the pancakes kept on giving, nor did my glass of raspberry tea never run dry. And no, the waitress did not come by and say someone had paid my bill. I was charged the \$2.99 for the pancakes and the \$1.29 for the tea. But when I got to the counter, God paid my bill. Yea, yea, I know. You're thinking it's some kind of a joke. But I'm serious here. And I guess the best way to help you understand would be to explain a few things.

Soon after Jesus told His Apostles to come away with Him and rest a while, they jump in a boat and sail about 4 miles across the Sea of Galilee. According to Mark's gospel, the crowd that had been with them on the one sea shore ran ahead and got to the other place before them (**<sup>33</sup>But many people recognized them and saw them leaving, and people from many towns ran ahead along the shore and got there ahead of them.**" <sup>1</sup> Mark 6:33). It was a big crowd, a total of 5000 men plus their families, as Matthew points out ("**There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children**"<sup>2</sup> Matthew 14:21). Jesus is filled with compassion so He begins to teach them. This goes on and on until late in the day the disciples, who probably hadn't eaten that promised meal yet, tell Jesus to send the people away so they could eat. Well, I love Jesus' response. He asks, quite sarcastically I imagine, where they could buy enough bread to feed all the people. <sup>7</sup>**Philip replied, "Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!"** Well, I'd probably be just as overwhelmed as Phillip. This would certainly be a major undertaking, not something you would want to plan on the spur of the moment. But then Andrew steps in. <sup>8</sup>**Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up.** <sup>9</sup>**"There's a**

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<sup>1</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>2</sup>*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Mt 14:21). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?"<sup>3</sup> (John 6:7-9). The rest of the story here surrounds Jesus blessing that small offering from the boy, and through Christ power it supplies enough food for everyone to be filled, plus plenty of leftovers.

Most of us love to dwell on the miracle here; that when Jesus blesses something the well never runs dry. And you've probably heard me pray this over our offerings time and time again. I believe that God can take whatever we give Him and do miraculous things through what appears to be small and insignificant. And there is a whole other lesson here we can learn from Andrew's response (What good is such a small offering in light of the size of the task). But I want to talk about a character in this story that demonstrates an attitude that is often times overlooked; it is the attitude found in the young boy who supplied the fish and bread in the first place.

I love this story about the boy because he wasn't standing there thinking, "Okay, I've got 50 loaves of bread and 20 small fish - here Jesus, here's my tithe". He didn't separate what he would give to Christ and what he could keep for himself. Recognizing true stewardship, the boy gives it all; Christ had a need. To understand the stewardship of our possessions and wealth is to first realize that they are not ours to begin with.

Most of the modern day teaching about tithing really misses the mark. When people talk about giving God His ten percent (A tithe), I often hear them say "I gave God a tenth of MY income. In the Old Testament the purpose of giving a tenth was to meet the material needs of the Levite, the tribe of Israel who received no land to live in because they were the one's who took care of the house of God. So God told the people to give a tenth. This tenth, or tithe, was used to support the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow (Deuteronomy 26:12-13). The basic understanding about tithing was that God owned it all to begin with. As His stewards they needed to realize that God is Lord of all. And as Lord of all He was demanding that a small portion of what belonged to Him in the first place be set

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<sup>3</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

aside so that others could be provided for. The rest was still His and should be treated and viewed as such.

This boy gave out of an understanding that what he had was God's in the first place; he was simply a steward of what belonged to God. But this thinking is seldom seen in our society. Most of the time, we are taught to give merely a tenth of OUR income to God. And ministers will either coerce us with guilt, quoting us the passage from Malachi 8 ("You have cheated Me of the tithes and offerings due to Me. You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating Me."<sup>4</sup> verses 8-9), or promise us blessings and rewards. Neither of these really addresses the root of the problem. I keep hearing people who tell me that if I do my part, God will do His. But true biblical stewardship is when we do our part because God has first done His.

Understanding this whole giving and tithing thing begins first from the realization that all that we have belongs to God. We are simply watching over it for a time until He presents a need. And tithing should happen not out of force nor out of promised rewards, but from the proper attitude. When we recognize that the money in our wallet or in our bank account really is His in the first place, how we manage that money and how tightly we hold on to that money completely changes.

In the New Testament the words "tithe" and "tithing" appear only eight times and all of these passages refer to Old Testament usage or current Jewish practice. Nowhere does the New Testament expressly command Christians to tithe. However, as believers we are to be generous in sharing our material possessions with the poor and for the support of Christian ministry. And this will truly happen when we Christians learn to recognize that it is all His to begin with.

So anyway, on Tuesday I was standing at the cash register and opened up my wallet when it suddenly occurred to me; I wasn't paying for my breakfast, God was. He was the one who provided the \$4.54 in the first place. If it were not for Him and His blessing, I wouldn't have the cash to buy breakfast or even to give my tithe. And understanding this should cause all of us to stop holding on to these things far too tightly. If we saw a need, would we be able to give as freely as this young boy? The answer can be found in our attitude.

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<sup>4</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.