

**Text:** Ac 20.4-6

**Proposition:** One material area that can reveal much about spiritual life: money!

Acts 5 opens with the story of Ananias and Sapphira, who, seemingly inspired by the generosity of Barnabas in Acts 4, brought an offering to the Jerusalem church.

- Barnabas sold a field and gave the whole proceeds to the church.
- Ananias and Sapphira also sold a field, and *said* they gave the whole proceeds to the church.

In Acts 8, Phillip evangelizes Samaria. Many are born again, Peter and John come, lay on hands... produces manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

- Simon the supposedly converted magician: “Sell me that power!”
- Peter: “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!” (Acts 8.20)

In Acts 11, prophets come to Antioch, predicting a famine and neediness to come in Jerusalem.

- The church in Antioch collected an offering to relieve the poor of the church of Jerusalem (Ac 11.29)
- They sent this offering to Jerusalem in the care of Barnabas and Saul (Ac 11.30)

Now, let’s turn to our text, Acts 20.

Read Ac 20.1-6, text 4-6.

What does our text have in common with the three stories I already mentioned? It isn’t obvious from the text of Acts 20, but the common element is money. We will show how that is so in just a moment.

The first definition of money, from Merriam-Webster, is:

“something generally accepted as a medium of exchange, a measure of value, or a means of payment”<sup>1</sup>

The concept of money, especially as coins to represent wealth, goes back a long time. The first mention in the Bible is Genesis 13.2,

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

Gn 13.2 ¶ Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold.

The first mention of money as a medium of exchange is Genesis 17.12,

Gn 17.12 “And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a *servant* who is born in the house or who is bought with money [silver] from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants.

Abraham is around 1800 BC. In historical documents, the concept goes back much further than that.

As I mentioned, in our passage, we will find that Paul’s travels at this time involve carrying money along with him.

Today I want to talk about what money can say about our spiritual life.

**Proposition:** One material area that can reveal much about spiritual life: money!

Note the word “can” — money doesn’t always reveal the spiritual life, nor does it reveal *everything* about the spiritual life, but it *can* reveal much.

## I. Explaining Paul’s movements

### A. Paul’s plans (Rm 15.22-29)

Note, Paul is writing Romans from Corinth in verse 2-3 of our text.

1. Paul’s mission in Greece and Asia Minor prevented a desired trip to Rome (22)
2. Now, mission completed, plans to visit Rome on way to Spain (23-24)
3. First, though, a trip to Jerusalem “serving the saints” (25)
  - a. Macedonia & Achaia raised an offering (26)
  - b. The offering a pleasure and a spiritual duty (27)
4. When Paul completes this duty, Paul will come to Rome on my way to Spain (28-29)

## B. Paul's concerns for Jerusalem

1. Historical (Acts 11.27-30, Gal 2.2,10)
  - a. This famine occurred in AD 46
  - b. Barnabas and Saul, serving together in Antioch, raise an offering
  - c. The "revelation" Paul mentions in Galatians (2.2) concerns the prophesied famine in Ac 11
  - d. On that visit, the apostles asked Paul to "remember the poor" (Gal 2.10 – as he had done in this instance)
2. Present (1 Cor 16.1-4, 2 Cor 8-9, Rm 15.22-27)
  - a. In 1 Cor 16, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their previous commitment to a relief offering (mentions churches of Galatia)
  - b. In 2 Cor 8-9, Paul devotes two chapters to the relief offering (worried about Corinthian attitudes)
  - c. We just went through Rm 15

These are the epistles of the third missionary journey

"All of his epistles written during the course of this third missionary period mention this project."<sup>2</sup>

## C. Paul's apprehensions (Rm 15.31)

1. Worried about safety: "that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea"
2. Worried about reception: "that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints"

## D. Paul's movements

1. Concerned about a plot (20.3)
  - a. Paul is about to depart, goal to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (Ac 20.16)

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<sup>2</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 415–16.

- b. Jewish people would regularly “charter” ships to take them to Jerusalem [by Syria] for the major feasts
  - c. Paul planned to take this ship, but a plot against him discovered
  - d. Plan B: go by land to Macedonia, over to Asia, catch a boat there
2. Accompanied by a crowd of representatives (20.4-5)
- a. We can find some of these names in the epistles: appear to be “representatives of the churches” for the offering (1 Cor 16.3-4, more on that later)
  - b. Locations more important
    - 1) Berea
    - 2) Thessalonica
    - 3) Derbe (Galatia)
    - 4) Asia (Ephesus)
  - c. Philippi and Corinth not mentioned
    - 1) Some think Luke is the representative from Philippi (“we” passages resume here)
    - 2) Possibly these are named as they were the men who gathered in Corinth for the occasion and the Corinthian rep would add himself to the group

Commentaries have other solutions to this question.
  - d. The team of men went ahead to Troas (5)
3. Delayed for Passover (20.6)
- a. Luke notes the occasion as a “time marker”
  - b. Observing the days in some way not prohibited, but not required in the church
  - c. As mentioned, here and in v. 5, “us” and “we” commence: Luke rejoins Paul (possibly the pastor of Philippian church)

## II. Understanding Paul's monetary policies

### A. Fiscal integrity (1 Cor 16.3-4)

#### 1. Security

- The number of travelers were a protection against thieves along the way

#### 2. Accountability

- a. Accountability to the churches giving the offering
- b. Accountability to each other as they carry the offering

### B. Spiritual generosity (Rm 15.27)

#### 1. Teaching mutual obligation

- a. Jerusalem's gift to the world: the gospel
- b. The world's gift back to Jerusalem: financial help for the poor (afflicted by unbelieving Jews)

#### 2. Building the new body, the church (Eph 2.11-16)

- a. The Jew-Gentile question plagued the church through the apostolic ministry
  - 1) Paul deals with it in Galatians (his first epistle, written about end of Ac 14)
  - 2) The epistle of Hebrews is an extended demonstration of the superiority of Christianity over Judaism
- b. Paul's constant concern: building two widely divergent cultures into one new body (Gentile [Greek-Latin culture] and Jewish)
- c. The offering was one means of building these ties across miles

The later church left off evangelizing Jews and came to persecuting Jews as the church grew in political power.

## III. Examining our hearts

### A. Taking careful care of church business

#### 1. Potential church conflicts: money and people problems

## 2. With integrity and carefulness, money problems minimized

### a. Paul's precedents

- 1) Appointed Titus as part of the accountability team (2 Cor 8.19)
- 2) Purpose: "providing things honest" (κΙV) (2 Cor 8.20)

### b. Counting teams, deacons' oversight

### c. Not running ahead of our money ...

I will not claim we always made the right decision on everything over the years, but our goal was to be careful and not rush ahead of ourselves.

We thank the Lord for his blessings as a result.

## B. Taking stock of our motives

### 1. When the New Testament describes offerings, they almost always never benefit the givers

- a. Ananias and Sapphira looked for enhanced reputation, but God rebuked them.

### 2. The constant emphasis was to give to needs of others

- a. In Acts 4-5, the poor brethren of Jerusalem
- b. In Acts 11, the poor brethren of Jerusalem (from Antioch)
- c. In Acts 20, the poor brethren of Jerusalem (from Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Greece)

### 3. In Philippians, Paul thanks them for a personal offering they sent, but is more thankful for their hearts than the gift

- a. He has learned how to do without
- b. And he learned how to work with his hands

The whole emphasis in the NT is looking outward, with generosity for the needs of other Christians.

**Conclusion:**

**Proposition:** One material area that can reveal much about spiritual life: money!

May God help us to have integrity and generosity as we serve him with our hands and with our gifts.