

What Jesus Has to Say About God's Economy

It is often said that Jesus had more to say about money than any other subject. From his statements about wealth and possessions, to his parables about agriculture and land, to his calling his followers to invest in treasures in heaven, Jesus' teachings are replete with the theme of wealth and possessions.

We might say that Jesus was, to some extent, an economist.

By saying that Jesus was an economist, I don't mean that Jesus was an economist in the sense that you and I think of an economist.

Jesus did not earn a degree in economics. He was not a major investor in the Roman economy. And he wrote no book on the issue of financial success. But he had a great deal to say about economics, and specifically how he envisioned God's economy.

But what do we mean by God's economy? Our modern word, "economy," really has more to do with profits and losses and wages and benefits.

It is concerned with trade deficits and budget deficits. It is focused on unemployment, welfare and a host of other issues. All of these are legitimate concerns in a modern-day economy like our own, but this is not exactly what is meant when talking about God's economy.

Before we move to unpack what we might mean by God's economy, we need to dispel some fallacies that I think are ingrained in our cultural subconscious.

First, while the idea is popular among religious conservatives, Jesus was not a capitalist, and his teachings should not be interpreted as being specifically supportive of capitalism.

It is hard to believe that Jesus even would have been a capitalist since he sided with the poor over the rich, and he gave up worldly possessions and called others to do the same.

So when some Christians want to argue that the Bible and Jesus support capitalism as God's ordained way of doing economics, they are sadly mistaken.

Second, one can be a follower of Christ and be a capitalist or a socialist. Following Jesus is not about one's concept of the best form of modern-day economics, despite those same religious conservatives saying the opposite in recent years.

We should never equate any political or economic ideology, such as capitalism or socialism, with being Christian or non-Christian.

Again, this is not to say that Jesus was not concerned with economics, for he clearly was.

So, in considering what Jesus said and did that defined God's economy, perhaps the idea we should dispel the most goes back to the word *economy*, and what exactly this word means.

The Greek word from which we get our English word *economy* is *oikonomia*. The word means house-law, or perhaps better, house rules or management.

It would have been used to talk about a family managing their household. But this would apply to more than simply managing the finances of the home.

If we consider, then, that Jesus was concerned with the economy, that is managing the household, we should ask exactly what this means.

We could take it as Jesus talking about individual households and families taking care of their own business and managing their own affairs.

But this seems a bit limiting, particularly when Jesus does not appear to be

concerned with the financial success of individual families.

What if we consider Jesus to be talking about all of creation as God's household? This, at least from my reading of Scripture, seems to make sense, and I think the story of creation from Genesis captures this idea wonderfully.

We are told that the representatives of humanity were to care for the garden in which God had placed them. They were charged with caring for God's household, and specifically with caring for each other.

And this, it appears, is how Jesus views God's economy; an economy that is not so much concerned with profits, but with the welfare of all.

Economic systems that are focused on profits are inherently inconsistent in the effects on the lives of people within a society, for they create the haves and the have-nots.

But God's economy, as envisioned by Jesus, confronts the economies of the world with their inherent inconsistencies toward humanity that caused some to be rich and others to be poor, and judges them as unjust.

What is needed to move our economics in line with God's economy is more fairness and equality.

When Paul was writing to the Corinthians to ask them to share with those in Jerusalem who were experiencing famine, he based that appeal on what Christ had done for them by becoming poor so that they could become rich.

Paul was, of course, speaking of a spiritual richness.

But, he also understood that the economy of God was about justice and fairness, and in calling the Corinthians to give up some of their wealth for the benefit of others, Paul said,

"I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is

a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.'"

- 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

Both Jesus and Paul understood that God was concerned with more than the spiritual welfare of people, and Jesus' message was certainly more about economics than we often admit.

But they also understood that God's economy was about fairness and justice, particularly toward the poor.

Christians can disagree as to how we create an economy that is more just and fair, but we cannot deny that Jesus was very clear about what constituted God's vision of a just and fair economy.

It was not the greedy accumulation of wealth that left others poor and destitute. It was the viewing of wealth and possessions as that which God graciously gives to some so that they might share with others.

The test of faithfulness to Jesus is always in how we treat the vulnerable of society. Christians who seek to follow Jesus in authentic discipleship should strive for the fulfillment of God's economy in which the one who has much does not have too much, and the one who has little does not have too little.

[DrewSmith](#), an ordained Baptist minister, is director of international programs at Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, Ark. He blogs at [WildernessPreacher](#).