

A WORD FROM REV. SMITH

He Practiced What He Preached

John Wesley preached a lot about money. He also earned a lot of money. In fact, over the course of his life - working in an age when mass media meant a printing press and word of mouth instead of television and the internet - Wesley earned the equivalent of \$30 million from donations, speaking engagements, books, and what he called 'Penny tracts.' When he died in 1791, he had no savings and only a few miscellaneous coins in his pockets and dresser drawers. So what did he do with all that money?

Charles Edward White of Spring Arbor College writes:

John Wesley knew grinding poverty as a child. His father, Samuel Wesley, was the Anglican priest in one of England's lowest paying parishes. He had nine children to support and was rarely out of debt. Once John saw his father being marched off to debtors' prison. So when John followed his father into the ministry, he had no illusions about the financial rewards.

It probably came as a surprise to John Wesley that while God had called him to follow his father's vocation, he had not also called him to be poor like his father. Instead of being a parish priest, John felt God's direction to teach at Oxford University. There he was elected a fellow of Lincoln College, and his financial status changed dramatically. His position usually paid him at least thirty pounds a year, more than enough money for a single man to live on. John seems to have enjoyed his relative prosperity. He spent his money on playing cards, tobacco and brandy.

While at Oxford, an incident changed his perspective on money. He had just finished paying for some pictures for his room when one of the chambermaids came to his door. It was a cold winter day, and he noticed that she had nothing to protect her except a thin linen gown. He reached into his pocket to give her some money to buy a coat but found he had too little left. Immediately, the thought struck him that the Lord was not pleased with the way he had spent his money. He asked him-

self, Will thy Master say, "Well done, good and faithful steward?" Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?

Perhaps as a result of this incident, in 1731, Wesley began to limit his expenses so that he would have more money to give to the poor. He records that one year his income was 30 pounds and his living expenses 28 pounds, so he had 2 pounds to give away. The next year his income doubled, but he still managed to live on 28 pounds, so he had 32 pounds to give to the poor. In the third year, his income jumped to 90 pounds. Instead of letting his expenses rise with his income, he kept them to 28 pounds and gave away 62 pounds. In the fourth year, he received 120 pounds. As before, his expenses were 28 pounds, so his giving rose to 92 pounds. . . He believed that with increasing income, what should rise is not the Christian's standard of living but the standard of *giving*.

Gain all you can; save all you can; give all you can, Wesley said.

Just thought you'd want to know he practiced what he preached.

Peace and joy,

Vicki

