

Buried Treasure

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[0 : 00] So I want you to imagine that it's the middle of the day, your phone rings, and it's a phone call that you weren't expecting. You don't know why they're calling, but it's from your husband, wife, significant other, partner, member of the family, anybody, but somebody that you weren't expecting a call from. And they say, rather nervously, as you take the call, I've got some good news and some not so good news for you. Which would you like first? Think for a moment, how would you answer that question? Because I suspect I know what most of us would do. But imagine this situation that you actually decide to say, actually, give me the good news first. There's a bit of a pause, and then the response comes back.

The airbags on that brand new car that we've just bought work really well. Generally speaking, faced in that scenario, we prefer to hear the bad news first, don't we? And I think the reason why we do so is because when we know that something big is coming down the track, we would rather do that which is going to require most processing first. If there's some news coming our way, and it has its, something big about it, we would rather that bit that is going to be more difficult to swallow, that which is going to require more effort to process and to come to terms with, we'd rather hear it first to give us a bit more time so we don't end on that note. I think that's probably why we would generally answer in the way we probably would. When it comes to the whole theme of Christian faith and Christian discipleship, being a follower of Jesus, we give it a gross misrepresentation if we present first everything about it that has about the theme of demands that it makes upon us. Because when it comes to the gospel message, let's not beat about the bush. There's, essentially, it is a message of good news, but it comes with a huge set of challenges. But we misrepresent that message if we effectively isolate away from everything else, everything about it that is particularly challenging. Whether it has to do with a personal cost to do with lifestyle, whether it has to do with the challenging stuff to do with ethics and morality, or whether it has to do with a theme of financial giving. And the reason

I want to start off with that, not just today, but at the beginning of this series, is let's be quite clear, we misrepresent the Christian gospel if we think it's all about what we're actually giving. If we make that our starting point, we misrepresent the message.

And Jesus told this parable, I think, really to make that point. We only understand it properly and authentically when it's placed within that bigger picture. Imagine, you're walking through a field and you've got a walking pole and it goes down into the ground with every step.

[3 : 50] And then all of a sudden, there's a thunk. As this thing hits something solid. And because of the noise that it makes, somehow you know it's not just a stone, it's not a chunk of rock that you've just hit.

So you stop and you scrape around a bit and you give it a couple more pokes and you sense that there's something a bit different lying beneath the soil. So you get down on your knees and you start to scrape the soil away and you realise that actually what you see there is something that looks like a sort of a chest. You begin to get quite excited, quite intrigued.

What is this thing? So you begin to try and pull this thing up. You manage eventually to prise the thing open and inside is a breathtakingly large stash of what appears to be gold.

Well, you suddenly can't believe what you've discovered. You're really excited. You want the contents of that chest. The only way you can get it is you don't want to just take it. If you could buy the field, then you could have the chest. But that's going to cost something.

And you think to yourself, how can I get it? How can I, how can I, incidentally, before we go any further, let's just make one thing clear. Jesus, in telling this parable, was not suggesting that we acquire stuff by dishonest means. When he told parables, there was one, generally speaking, there was one focal point in each parable. And if you stray too far from that point and start to break it

down, the analogy breaks down and you can end up going up any kind of alleyway of interpretation. Now, the point is, is that Jesus was saying, you discover this thing and it's really good, but it's going to cost you if you want to get it. And, and, and, but that's not really the point. Because as you begin to think, if you're, in order to obtain this, this, this field that this treasure is buried in, you're going to have to sell everything else that you've got. Now, in that scenario, your focus could be on everything that you're going to have to get rid of. But actually, the reality is going to be that that is not your focus. Your attention is going to be consumed by the treasure that you've just discovered. That's the point. That's the picture. And Jesus gives us this image to, as a, as a way of getting across that which takes place within us when we get a glimpse of what the message of his kingdom is about. The stuff that God has done for us, that which God is going to give us, that which God wants us to have, wants us to enjoy, wants us to know, that reality of freedom that can only be found when we come to know

[6 : 29] God as our Lord and our Saviour and our Friend. Only when we grasp that is everything else put in to perspective. Everything that we own, everything that we previously aspired towards, it might still be important, but it's put into a new perspective.

perspective. And it's for that reason that we shouldn't be surprised that when we look at the teaching of Jesus, he had so much to say about the subject of money, because it needs to be put into perspective. And it is put into perspective when we discover the reality of God. When we look at the parables of Jesus, roughly two-thirds of his teaching material was on the subject of money. He had more to say about the subject of money than he had to say about faith, than he had to say about prayer, than he had to say about heaven and hell and judgment. Why would he say so much about the subject? Well, think for a few moments about what money claims to offer us. It aims to give us security, to give us peace, happiness, a sense of freedom, a sense of control, a sense of empowerment.

All of those things that God promises to give us. And there's a very real sense, therefore, that money represents God's biggest rival.

Which is why Jesus said you can be, no one can be slave of two masters. You take your choice. But when we take the choice of God and everything that God represents, and we see that, in fact, he is the source of all things good.

[8 : 23] He is the source of anything that money could buy, and so much more. Then everything is put into a new perspective. I want to share with you an image that some of you would have heard me shared a few weeks ago.

So you would have heard this before, but in thinking through this subject this morning, although I don't like to repeat myself too much, I think this is such an important image. So I share it with you. I got here, you might have noticed, there's a piece of rope stretched across the front of the stage here.

And I want you to imagine that although this rope does have an end to it, eventually, I want you to imagine it doesn't. I want, for the sake of this illustration, I want you to imagine that this rope stretches right here around the stage, goes out that door, and then goes on, and on, and on, and then it never ends.

Okay. And I want you to imagine that that piece of rope is a timeline of your life that stretches from when you were born right the way into eternity.

Now, whether you actually believe in eternity or not, just stay with me, and for the sake of this short message, just imagine that it is a reality. Yeah. So this is a timeline of your life, and it goes on throughout all eternity, forever, and forever, and ever.

[9 : 43] But this little red bit here represents your few years here on earth. Now, isn't it the truth that most of the time we get so absorbed by the concerns of this life here, and let's be really brutally honest, with our financial concerns, with our planning, that we're so focused on all this.

We might believe that all this exists, but our focus is on here. And we can spend our whole lives planning for our retirement, putting things in place, knowing that we can settle in.

We work hard through here, through here, through here, through here. So this last little bit just here, we get to enjoy. What about this?

What about this? Now, look, before I say anything else, I do know about all the classic critiques of religion that Karl Marx and that entire school of thought brings, and rightly so.

Marx, in a nutshell, said, look, the danger of all this is that it's pie in the sky when you die, and if you just detract everyone in this direction, away from this, you can push them around and exploit them.

[11 : 02] And so he called religion the opium of the people. That was a rightful criticism to make. Of course it was. But that's not what the Christian gospel is about.

The Christian gospel doesn't, it's not pie in the sky when you die, it doesn't distract us from this bit here because of this. It's the other way around. It's precisely because of all this that we are empowered for these three score years and ten, or however short or long, it might be here.

The difference it makes is beyond words when we see that this here is what matters.

And at the start of this series, as we begin to think about this subject and our relationship between what what Jesus described as the worries and the concerns and the hopes of this world, the cares of this world, our finances, and those things that claim to give us security, you know, when we see all of that in the light of this, they're still important.

Of course they are, but they're put into a different perspective. We're going to pray in just a moment, but before we do, I just want to tell you one last story.

[12 : 35] And if you forget about everything else that I've said over these last few minutes, please just remember this one story. If you're in the car tomorrow making a journey somewhere, just think about this story.

Don't close your eyes while you're driving, but think about this story. Or maybe over lunch, just think about this, whatever, in the next week, just please, please, please think about this story and what it might mean.

In 1937, somebody called John D. Rockefeller died. Rockefeller was widely considered by many people to have been possibly the wealthiest human being that ever lived.

He most certainly was the wealthiest human being in modern times. He made it very big in the early days of the oil industry and grew an enormous empire.

At one point, it was reckoned that he personally owned something in the region of 1.5% of the entire US economy.

[13 : 44] That's even bigger than Bill Gates by a mile. So he was a very, very, very rich man. Shortly after he died in 1937, there was a press conference.

One person asked Rockefeller's accountant who was there, how much did he leave?

the room went silent. The accountant thought about it for a moment and he said this. He left all of it.

He left all of it. He left all of it. That's why people were liter in need and the shouldn't go home.

Let's go to