

Time and gifts

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Preacher: Rev. Suzy Kirkham

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. Can you all hear me okay? Yeah, great. Okay, so in some old translation of the Bible, they talk about talents, but I think that the NIV version that we've just heard, when it explains it as bags of golds, is really helpful. And the point being that it's a lot of wealth that's been entrusted to the servants. And in Luke 28, 48, it reminds us there, to whom much is given, much is required. And I wonder if over the course of the pandemic, whether you've had a chance to think about how you're spending, or maybe I should say investing your life with all that you've been given, what is required of your life. And as we've been regathering as a church, this series that we're doing on Christian disciplines has been really challenging, I think, and getting us to rethink and review all areas of our life, as part of this Christian community, our prayer lives, our worship, our giving, things like that. Because our lives matter, all of it, as part of God's story of renewing all things.

In our home and work lives, it's important to remember that we follow a God who cares not just about the engineers, but about engineering, not just about lawyers, but about the law, not just about teachers, but about what they teach, and not just about us as parents, but how we parent. And if we're retired, he cares what we do with our retirement too. So our work matters, our lives matter with what we do with them. And yes, our lives should matter in regard to spiritual things. But God also cares about what we create, and what we invest in, and how we steward them too. And if Pauline can put up, there's a couple of pictures here. During the week, I've been reading about, sorry, sorry. We have a cautionary tale here of a couple that were part of the Tetra Pak industry. They were heirs to the Tetra Pak industry. And this is an example of lives that haven't been lived so well. And can you just put the other picture up as well? Yeah, this couple here. So I remember reading about them. They were really rich. They'd got on the surface everything that you could possibly want in a privileged life in British society. And yet, their lives were a mess. They were heirs to a five billion pound industry. And at one stage, the wife was arrested for trying to smuggle cocaine into the United States of America embassy, which wasn't a great idea. And tragically, she was found dead from a drug addiction, from a drug overdose. So the wealth that a lot of people aspire to had only actually brought, you know, misery and infamy and addiction. And then we then look at compare this to another entrepreneur. So this guy here, I've been reading about the life of the Christian entrepreneur, who started the toy shop, the entertainer, and his name is Gary Grant. I keep referring to him as Carrie Grant for some reason. But anyway, whatever.

So he started a massive toy shop industry. And in Bristol, there is a big shop there that my children used to spend hours and hours looking around trying to spend their pocket money and their Christmas money. Now, this guy is a Christian. He describes himself as a charismatic Christian. And he founded the entertainer in 1981 when he was just 22. And it's grown to over 170 stores. And even during the pandemic, it's actually remained quite strong. He's got a really good online presence as well. And during the pandemic, he's helped give loads of money to charity. He's worked with the food bank and Trussell Trust. He used his warehouses to store food and stuff that Tesco's were giving to the food bank. And then he actually used his vans and stuff to go and deliver it to people that needed it. And part of the interview that I read upon that he had with the Guardian says this, every one of us can be a philanthropist. It's about getting on the journey of how can I be generous. People can be generous with their skills, their time, their efforts, and their assets, just as with their money. And he talks about building a culture in his business that encourages staff to give a percentage of their monthly wage to charity. And also, he set up this platform called Pennies. And it's like if you go into the shop and you pay £4.99, if you round it up to £5, all of those pennies that are collected is put towards charities. And they've managed to raise over £750,000 a year just from collecting pennies.

So he has had a life well lived. He started out with one shop, and now I think he's in his early 60s. He's a model of what it looks like to live with a kingdom focus. And I think that's what this passage today is all about. It's about using the gifts and blessings and opportunities that we are given for our Master, who is our Heavenly Father. And it gets us to think about what we're doing with our lives, not just about our wealth, as we're going to talk about, but the totality of what we've been given. Our education, our families, our strengths, our community life, our giftings, our service, our careers, our generosity, our homes, and so on. And rather than just settling for what most people do, for a pleasurable life, where we just sort of focus on our own family, maintaining our own families, having a nice house, a nice car, maintaining our privilege, and not looking beyond ourselves, it's much better and fulfilling to have a life that takes our strengths and our opportunities to build something that can be used for the benefit of others. And our goal should be to want to get to a place where life has meaning because we're using our gifts for others, and in doing so, we have invested the totality of our life well. Let me say that again. We've invested the totality of our life well. Basically, we're having a go. So let's look at this passage and get a few insights into what Jesus is talking about when he's talking about building the kingdom of God.

[6 : 51] So three servants are given five, two, and one bags of gold while their master goes away. And on his return, the first two servants have doubled what they were entrusted with and are rewarded for being good stewards of their wealth. The final servant, though, just buries his bag of gold and has nothing to show with what he's been entrusted with. He's punished and called a wicked and a lazy servant.

So some insights into this parable. The first thing, it seems on the face of it that the wealth entrusted to the servants is about what we do with our money. But I think it's more broader than that.

It's about what we do with our life. David Wenham is a New Testament scholar, and he points out that the Greek word is talanta, which was the equivalent to the wages of a worker for 10 years. So the first servant, the master, is giving 100 years worth of income in one go. Wow. This is about a life's worth or value about what you do with all that God has entrusted you with. And Wenham says, this is about how we spend our lives. And our master is our heavenly father. He's given us all our gifts and wealth and opportunities. And while not everyone is given by God the same life choices and opportunities, we are all given things to do according to our abilities.

The second thing is, the first two servants have the same attitude to what they were given.

It's sometimes really easy to fall into the trap of playing the comparison game. You know, so-and-so was given so much more than me, so-and-so is so much more cleverer than me. And I think of my own life growing up as a white woman, growing up in the UK, in a fairly comfortable, fairly middle-class family, and then being married to my husband. And whilst not having a lavish lifestyle, we've had a good life with all the opportunities that have been given to us. And I compare that to some of the friends that I've known that have been born into very different kinds of families with all sorts of struggles to overcome in early life. I now never cease to be delighted when I see them doing well when they're going back to college, retraining, getting jobs, or becoming loving and caring parents.

[9 : 10] And they've had so many hurdles to achieving this. But what is important in this parable is not the fairness of life's opportunities or giftings or blessings, but what we do with what we're being given by God. The third thing is, the first two servants invest their wealth wisely. They invest their lives wisely and bring a great return from what they've been given.

To whom much is given, much is required. And they pass that test. Gary, sorry, Gary Grant has used his wealth to give back to the local and wider community in so many ways. And he's become a man of influence, overtly Christian for good, for the kingdom of God.

To whom much is given, much is required. And to those found faithful, much more will be given. And then the final servant, on the other hand, is lazy and wicked. He treads water. He neither loses the wealth nor gains more. He's buried what's entrusted to him, and he never allows himself the opportunity for growth or multiplication with his life. So that servant is reprimanded for not doing what is expected of him. He's called wicked and lazy and useless. And this shows the need for work and productivity with what you're entrusted with, as opposed to laziness and timidity.

This is like the passage Matthew 5.15, and hiding your lamp under a bowl. Use what God has given you. Let your light shine. Have a go. I really love the parables that Jesus tells, and I find that a lot of them are about spreading the kingdom of God. Whether it's a small seed that is planted and grows to become one of the biggest trees where all the birds of the air can come and find a home, or

whether it's a little boy's lunchbox that feeds 5,000 people. And so if we too think of our lives in these kingdom terms, we need to want to be expectant to see the kingdom of God coming through how we invest our lives. And part of this has been intentional about how we live the other six days of our lives, not just our Sundays. It isn't that church isn't important. It isn't that evangelism is important. It isn't that growing in your spiritual giftings aren't important. But God makes us stewards of the whole of creation, and we are actively to be involved in every aspect of our lives in creating resources, opportunities, and being a blessing wherever we are. Going back through history, Christians have always applied their Christian gifts and their talents and their dreams to this task, to create more just, more kind communities and cultures of good news.

They've opened schools and hospitals, orphanages and youth clubs. Can you just put the last slide up, Paulie, just to show Cadbury's world? That's great. Yeah, thank you.

[12:05] So my daughter lives in Birmingham, and she lives quite close to the village of Bourneville, which is where the Cadbury factory is. Now I think Cadbury's now have been taken over by an American company, unfortunately. But their history, and the history of the Cadbury family, is fascinating.

They were Protestant Christians, and they were Quakers. And beside giving us chocolate, they were at the forefront of treating their staff with unheard of dignity and opportunities.

And they built this entire village of homes and schools and churches for their employees to save them, in George Cadbury's words, from the evils of modern, more cramped living conditions.

So what is the dream that God has placed on your life? This isn't about comparing yourself to others, but asking, with what God has given me, what am I going to do to steward it well?

So just look at three areas of our lives. Our home and family, our work, and our church. Of course, there's so much more to our lives, our hobbies, our health, creativity, friendships.

[13:10] But with a vision for investing what God has given to us in these areas, what would it look like to steward the gifts when it comes to family, work, and church?

Could it be said that the Christian life is about growing in responsibility with what has been entrusted to you? So you know, in your home and family, whatever they might look like for you, we have such an opportunity to live counter-culturally and kingdom-orientated.

And so using your Christian imagination and gifts, what could your family do to invest what you have to bless others with what you have and share the good and transformational news of Jesus that you have?

Maybe there's a great cause or a Christian charity like Compassion or Open Doors or one of the Ugandan charities that Terry and Deb talked about last week that your family could get involved in. Or maybe being the kind of home that is open and allows other kids and families to be welcome and blessed.

Maybe you could break generational patterns and sins and start a whole new family lineage that knows and walks with God. So think about how you can invest whatever your family looks like to be used wisely and faithfully for the kingdom of God.

[14:26] And then we consider work. We've already talked about Gary Grant and Mr. Cadbury. But again, with some Christian imagination, what would it look like not to simply go with the flow or tread water, but to be someone who uses the whole of their lives as a blessing?

Whether that be creating cultural change in your workplace or as a business owner, taking Christian ethics and applying it to what you do. For some people, I imagine a small amount of people really, their legacy might be that their professional career on a big scale may change the direction of their industry.

Or if you're extremely lucky, I have to say I've never been, you might earn vast amounts of money that you can generously give away. But for most of us here, I imagine, it's going to be the deep and profound impact on the lives of all that you meet through your Monday to Friday, your nine to five. And then finally, we look at our faith and church as we're gathering and reviewing our lives. As Christians, we are to be seekers first of the kingdom of God.

The expectation is that every servant puts what he is given to use for God's redemptive plans of making all things new. Paul in Romans 12 speaks of the different gifts given to each and urges that they are to be used for good.

[15:49] And Ephesians 4 speaks of Christ as his ascension, giving gifts to each one of us. Grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. And in order to see God's kingdom grow and this church able to get on with the mission of God, how are you investing the whole of your life towards the

growth of the people of God?

I'm really aware that in Clevedon, a lot of people are involved in really great charities here and groups and organizations that are outside of the church. But as Christ Church put here, we are called to be the local church put here to help with transformation of this town and the nation. And that you've all got skills and gifts that are completely needed if we are to fulfill our mission. And so as we step out, as opposed to sitting on what we've been given to us, it's important to remember that we're never really sure, there's never a good time, and you're never really ready. But at some point, we need to take a stand to have a go. Now, most of you have probably received through the emails or through posts a list of opportunities that there are at the church to get involved in, to actually help with the mission and outreach of the church. And as we're regathering, we're really asking people to seriously look at this, to pray about it, to think about it. Maybe there's one or two things that you could get involved in. There's vast opportunities here, but I'm just going to name a couple of them.

[17:26] So maybe children's work. Maybe you want to get involved in the TLG mentoring programs. That's been amazing outreach. Or maybe with the kids and the youth, or the little fish toddler group, or the fridge.

Now, maybe you don't want to actually hang around with the children. It's not my favourite thing. But actually coming and helping to set up or pack away to enable that to happen would be amazing. Or maybe you're brilliant at DIY or gardening, and you want to get together with a little team that comes here and helps keep this place looking good and working well for the many missional groups and outreach projects that are going on here during the week.

Or maybe you want to get involved in the seniors or the pastoral work that we've got going on here, so that we look after the people that we've already got here, and we look after the people that are coming in here with various problems, issues, things they're dealing with.

So we've got things like the grief cafe, the care homes that go out to visit them, or just like providing transport. So there's no end. So I really ask that if you get that form, don't just like delete it on your email or whatever, just pray about it and think about it.

Because if we can all do one or two things, every single person, the whole of this church can do one or two things, I'm sure we can fill all those gaps and just really get together for the mission.

[18:46] You see, at the end of your life, the resources you have are not your own. They are the masters, and they need to be returned. And I hope for all of us that we will have a go for his sake.

So as we finish, what is the challenge of this parable? How do we go from burying our goal to bringing a great return to our master? I expect that the main challenge will be how to implement what you think that God is calling you to do.

How do you transform inspiration to reality? And in order to start implementing it, we have to start overcoming fear with the help of God and beginning to invest the whole of our lives for something greater than the ordinary, pleasurable life that most people are seeking.

And remember, success or failure is not a one-off event. They go hand in hand. It's the regular rhythms. And success is often the result of repeated failures that we learn from.

And then we should set goals and be accountable to each other from the start. That's really important. And then we need to take some decisive action. So pray, ask God to help you to want to live your whole life for him.

[19:54] Ask him for opportunities that you might dream dreams and be inspired. Have a go. Don't tread water. Start sowing and let the Spirit of God breathe upon your life and your faithfulness and see what happens.

Amen.