

TRINITY LECTURE 3 - Bible Study

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Date: 20 March 2008

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[0 : 00] I'm going to read God's Word now and if you'd like to follow along there's Black Bibles in the pew and tonight's reading comes from Luke chapter 16 verses 1 to 9 and it can be found on page 851 of the Black Bibles.

Luke chapter 16 verses 1 to 9 Then Jesus said to the disciples, There was a rich man who had a manager. And charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property.

So he summoned him and said to him, What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager any longer. Then the manager said to himself, What will I do now that my master is taking the position away from me?

I'm not strong enough to dig and I'm ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that when I'm dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.

So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, How much do you owe my master? He answered, A hundred jugs of olive oil.

[1 : 18] He said to him, Take your bill, Sit down quickly, And make it fifty. Then he asked another, And how much do you owe? He replied, A hundred containers of wheat.

He said to him, Take your bill, And make it eighty. And his master commended the dishonest manager, Because he had acted shrewdly. For the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation, Than are the children of light.

And I tell you, Make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth, So that when it is gone, They may welcome you into the eternal homes. We'll keep open the Bibles at that page, If you like. And this is the third of our Bible studies. They're, in a sense, Three unrelated passages, But each with a theme or focus, To do with Christian mission, Which is the theme of these lectures this week. So let's pray now, Before we look at the passage. God our Father, Speak to us from your word, From this parable of Jesus. Give us understanding.

[2 : 34] But above all, Help us to act as Jesus exhorts us to act. For the glory of his name, And for the salvation of many. Amen.

Well, there's no shortage of advice about investments, Whether the economy is good or bad. You can always find people who are willing to take your money, To give you advice about how to invest whatever is left of your money, After they take their share.

You can have banks or bonds, Shares, Future, Gold, Property, Superannuation, Annuities, Fixed term, Not fixed term. The choice is limitless, Really.

It's a wonderful smorgasbord of possibilities for us. And no wonder, Therefore, There are plenty of financial advisors, Because if you're like me, You've really got no idea what to do with the coins left over in your pocket at the end of the week, Or whatever.

The spirit of our age is, Make your money work for you. And in part, That's what's in this parable tonight as well, But in a far different way from the ethos of our society.

[3 : 42] Well, Maybe life would have been easier in Jesus' day, In Jewish times or Old Testament times, Because it was illegal to levy an interest rate, Usually in most circumstances against a fellow Jew.

There are laws about that in Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy. And especially when you lend to the poor, Not to exhort or extract interest from them. And part of the Old Testament law was to prevent the domination of rich people Over the suppression and long-term poverty of other fellow Israelites, To limit exploitation, And to encourage a relatively egalitarian, sharing, generous society.

Now, of course, In those times, You won't be surprised to learn that clever people found ways around the laws. So, the law, for example, That said you are not allowed to levy an interest rate against your fellow Israelite.

Well, okay, I borrow 75 shekels from somebody. He can't levy me interest, But the bill for what I owe him back Happens to say 100 shekels.

Though I borrow 75. It's not strictly interest, It's not strictly interest, of course. They're bending the laws. But that's what some would do. That sort of practice To try and get around the laws About interest rates.

[5 : 07] I borrow 60 jugs of oil Or 60 bags of wheat or something And the bill that comes to me of what I owe is 90 or 80 or something like that.

No interest stipulated. The lender can't be caught. But in effect, interest is being paid on those accounts. After all, If that's what happens to me, That person is making their money work for them. Now, it's certainly not often in the Bible That a dishonest person is praised. But that's what we find here in this passage tonight.

So this is quite surprising and very striking And one of the thorny difficulties of the parable that Jesus is teaching. It's a parable with actually quite a deal of difficulty And we need to understand what is Jesus getting at So that we actually apply this correctly.

Well, Jesus says there was a rich man who had a manager And charges were brought to him That this man was squandering his property. Probably the rich man is an absentee landlord.

[6 : 14] He owns a property. He entrusts it to somebody to manage for him. And he hears that this man is somehow squandering his property Which may or may not be dishonest. It may be incompetence Or it may be deliberate dishonesty.

But in a sense, that doesn't matter. The man may be negligent Or he may be dishonest. The manager, when he's confronted with his squandering Doesn't actually object to the charge that's laid against him.

And in verse 2 He's summoned by the landowner What's this I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management Because you cannot be my manager any longer.

And he's sacked. And he accepts that. And he's to provide an audit Presumably for his successor An inventory A list of creditors and debtors And all that sort of thing.

Well there's no centrelink in those days As there is none in many countries of our world today.

What's this man going to do?

[7 : 19] So it's hardly likely that he's going to walk into another Property management job Given that he's sacked from this one Because he's squandered Some of the property In some way Whether he's dishonest or incompetent It's going to be hard for him to get another job.

He says to himself Now that my master's taking the position away from me I'm not strong enough to dig So he's a white collar worker I guess Prefers to sit behind a desk And he's ashamed to beg What options are there left for him?

Somehow he needs to provide for his future Because presumably he doesn't Despite looking after somebody else's money and property He doesn't probably have a decent superannuation portfolio. And then it dawns on him in verse 4 Ah! I've got it! If this were a cartoon The next little box for verse 4 Would have the electric light globe flashing above his head Bingo!

I've thought now I've realised I've worked out What I'm going to do To stave off the plight that awaits me A jobless Unsupported plight Where I can't really work physically I'm not going to get another job like this I'm far too ashamed to beg Nobody's going to look after me Nobody's going to care for me I've worked out what I'm going to do And what he does As we well know Is that he calls in the debtors And rewrites their accounts So he summons his master's debtors One by one He asked the first How much do you owe my master?

[8 : 57] And he answered A hundred jugs of olive oil He said to him Well take your bill Sit down quickly And make it Fifty Oh It doesn't look as though He's going to get money out of this So what's his ploy?

He asked another How much do you owe? He says A hundred containers of wheat And he said to him Well take your bill And make it eighty Wipes off twenty percent Now the issue is not Whether he's being fair For these two people The second one Maybe doesn't know About the first And he doesn't complain That it's eighty percent Not fifty percent In a sense It doesn't matter It's a Perhaps a relatively Arbitrary Thing Both amounts Are very large By the way The amounts Are in effect For the olive oil Nine hundred gallons And for the grain Or wheat A thousand bushels So we're dealing With significant loans here We're not dealing With trivial amounts Now there are Three interpretations For what's going on In this action By the manager Of the land The first interpretation

Is that this manager is diddling His landlord That is He's wiping off Some of the debt Maybe as an act Of revenge An act of dishonesty In order somehow To get back At this manager At this landlord For sacking him Okay I'm going to show you I'm going to wipe out Half your profit Or twenty percent Of your profit That's one interpretation He's cheating On his boss These people Legitimately owe The hundred Or the Whatever it is And he's Dishonestly Maybe out of revenge Wiping out the debt Or at least Fifty Twenty percent Of the debt A second interpretation Is that the manager Is wiping off His landlord's Illegal component So in the first case With the olive oil How much do you owe A hundred jugs And he says Well make it fifty Now this interpretation Would be that the Original person Had borrowed Fifty jugs of olive oil But was written out In effect a bill That he owed back

A hundred Now that was certainly Done in these days And earlier As I said before To get around The interest rate issue So one interpretation Is that what this Manager is doing Is in effect Taking away The illegal component That his landlord Master would have Benefited from So he's sort of Making the loan Legal It's at a cost To his landlord It's in a sense To the benefit Of the other people The third interpretation Is like the second Except here It's this manager Who's actually Put on the percentage Cream Not his landlord That is he's the one Who set up the deals He's managing the property Etc Somebody came to Borrow fifty jugs of oil He gives them fifty jugs But he writes the bill Himself This manager For a hundred Maybe for his own pocket So there are The three interpretations One is that He's acting out of

Revenge Dishonestly Against his master Secondly That he's taking off The illegal component That would go to the master Or thirdly Taking off the illegal component That he himself Had written Now which options Are most likely The commentaries And scholars Disagree And I'm not sure That we can be Absolutely certain here At one level It perhaps doesn't Quite matter But it's worth Thinking a little bit After this action The master The landlord Discovers What this man Has done So in verse 8 His master Commended The dishonest Manager Because he had Acted Shrewdly Now we need To be careful Here This is where This parable Becomes Very tricky In this last Couple of verses The boss Is commending The dishonest Manager Which may refer Back to him Squandering the property

[13:18] In general But maybe More particularly Refers to the Action of Taking down The debt From 100 To 50 Or 100 To 80 That is That then Is regarded As a dishonest Action In which case It would be The first option This man Is acting Out of Some spite Or revenge Against his Master And therefore Trying to get Back at him By lowering The debts In the audit But notice Too That the Master Commends Him Not for Being dishonest But for Being shrewd Now we might Think well Okay if the Master has Lost his Fair share Of what's Due back To him He's hardly Going to Commend him At all But he's Not commending Him for Dishonesty He's Commending Him for Shrewdness For cunning That is He may say Oh I Realise I'm going To lose Out in This But you've Actually been Very shrewd

In the way You've acted That could Well be the Case I suspect But make Sure you Get it Right That he's Commended For shrewdness Not for Dishonesty If it's The first Option That what He's done Is basically Acted out Of spite Against his Master And lowered The debts Dishonestly We might Expect the Master's a Bit more Angry But remember That the Issue is The shrewdness If it's The second Or third Option Where he's Writing off The illicit Part of The bill That is They actually Borrowed 50 Were given A bill For 100 Now he's Put it Back down To 50 Or back Down To 80 Then maybe We ought To be Surprised That he's Now called A dishonest Manager Here In verse 8 Because his Action is Technically In those Cases Not dishonest He's Actually acting Now legally Correcting A dishonesty Whether it Was his Own greed At first

Or his Master's Greed Perhaps Doesn't Matter So possibly The first Option Is the Right one But the Key issue Is his Shrewdness Or his Cunning Notice what He's actually Been doing In this Because his Actions here Are not For his Financial Benefit Directly That is The lowering Of the Debt Benefits The debtors Really He's not Getting more Money in His pocket And his Master is Certainly Losing out In each Of the Cases But notice How verse 8 finishes He's Commended Because he Acted Shrewdly For Jesus Says The children Of this Age Are more Shrewd In dealing With their Own Generation Than are The children Of light Now what Jesus is Saying there Is that This man Has acted For his Own benefit With cunning

And shrewdness What he's Done actually Is at the End of Verse 4 I have Decided What to Do so That when I'm Dismissed As manager People may Welcome me Into their Homes That is He's not

Reaping a Financial reward Directly Here But he's Creating Friends Out of the Debtors They will Think you Did me A good Deal By changing My debt From 100 To 50 Or 100 To 80 Now you're Out of a Job We've got Some sympathy For you Welcome Stay in our Home for a While we'll Look after you For a little Bit That is It's an Indirect Benefit That comes Back to This shrewd Manager Jesus comment At the end Of verse Eight Is that The children Of this Age That is The pagans Of our World The people Of the World Rather than Belonging To Jesus They are More shrewd In dealing With their Own generation Than other Children of Light Now this Man is Basically just Trying to Set himself Up for Somebody to Look after Him when He loses His job In this Life here On earth In the Short Medium Maybe even The slightly Longer term On earth For this Life And it's His shrewdness In dealing With that That his Master Commends And what Jesus Notes Jesus Doesn't Commend him For dishonesty Or squandering The property But the Example of This man Is his Shrewdness In setting Up Friends To Welcoming Him Into Their Homes Here On earth And Jesus Comments By way of Contrast The children Of this Generation And the Children Of light And that's Where the Application Comes In the Final verse Of all Of this But before We get to That verse People sometimes Interpret this Parable As if the End Justifies The means

[18:21] So that The man's End Is his Benefit And friendship With others And that Justifies The means By which He procures The end If the Goal is Good Then the Doctrine Of the End Justifying The means Means That Doesn't Matter how You get There So long As the Goal Is good That's Not a Biblical View Although Sometimes It's Sadly One of Our Views In the Way We Act Ethically So For Example You Might Steal Things Because What you're Doing is Providing For your Children Or you Lie Because you Don't want To lose A friend Or you Don't want To upset Another Person That's a Doctrine Of the End Justifying The Means That is Okay It's probably Not right That I Say this Word of Criticism To my Friends So I Won't Say I Don't Want to Hurt Their Feelings Because Hurting Their Feelings Would Be A Bad Thing A Good Goal Is Not Hurting

Their Feelings And so We Might Lie Or you Speed Because you Need to Get to Church On Time And I Think well Getting to Church on Time That's That's Pretty Important I Need To Be There Because I'm Doing Something Or whatever It is I remember A recent Well not That recent But one Of my Last speeding Tickets Was because I was Running Late To a Funeral But I Didn't Want to Appeal The Issue The End Didn't Justify The Means Actually This Parable Does Not Support The View That The End Justifies The Means Though It's Been Interpreted Along Those Lines As Though This Man's Dishonesty Is Justified Sometimes This Parable Has Been Therefore Wrongly Interpreted It's It's A Tricky Parable Verse Nine Is The Exhortation The Application Of The Parable To Jesus Listeners And Beyond That To Us I Tell You Make

Friends For Yourselves By Means Of Dishonest Wealth So That When It Is Gone They May Welcome You Into Their Eternal Homes Now Jesus Is Setting Up A Parallel Between What This Man Has Done And How Christians Are To Behave But Unfortunately The Translation Here That I've Read The NRSV Uses The Expression Dishonest Wealth And Therefore There Are Those Who Would Interpret This As Saying It's Okay To Act Dishonestly Or To Procure Wealth Dishonestly For A Good Goal But Actually The Word Is Simply Worldly Wealth It Has A Negative Connotation But Not Necessarily A Dishonest One Worldly Wealth Is For This Age Not For The Age To Come And Jesus Is Saying Use Worldly Wealth Not Dishonestly But Use Worldly Wealth For Setting Up Friendships Like This Man But Where

Jesus Application Differs Is That Those People Whom You Establish As Friends Welcome You Not Into Their Home Tomorrow When You Have Lost Your Job But As The End Of Verse Nine Says They Welcome You Into The Eternal Homes You See That's Where The Contrast Of Verse Eight Comes Into Play Children Of This Age And Children Of Light Or Believers Followers Of Jesus They Act Shrewdly With Their Money For This Age But Jesus Is Saying It's Mere Worldly Wealth Greater Purpose Not Dishonestly But For A Greater Purpose For The World To Come Which Is So Much More Valuable That Is Jesus Is Saying If The Pagans Of Our World Are Coming In Their Use Of Money To Establish Friendships Etc How Much More Important Is It For The Children Of Light Followers Of Jesus That They Use Fleeting Worldly Wealth

For Establishing Eternal Friendships So Verse Nine Says Make Friends For Yourselves That They Those Friends Welcome You Into The Eternal Homes That Is In Effect Heaven As This Manager Shrewdly Maybe Dishonestly As Well But The Issue Is Shrewdly Not Dishonesty Has Used His Money For His Future On Earth So Are Believers To Use Their Worldly Money Not Simply For This World But For Friends For Eternity Well We Are Constantly Exhorted In This World To Make Our

Money Work For Us And Our World Is Ingenious At Finding Ways For Money To Work If You Are Like Me You Will Get An Email Every Day Giving You Some
[23 : 23] Scam Way Of Making Huge Amounts Of Money Some Of The Emails I Don't Usually Read Them In Any Detail But Some Of Them Begin You Can Earn \$1500 A Week Click Delete I Don't Even Read On I'm Sure It's A Scam Or Dear Mr Barker I Am The Widow Of Or The Widower Of Some Person Who Decided To Leave Money To Me In Their Will Or Whatever It's Bizarre That People Fall For This Scam But You Could If They Were Not Scams You Would Be Multi Millionaire To Be Honest I Would Be Richer Than Anyone In Australia If All Those Scams That I Received By Emails Were True And I Followed Them Up But I Followed None Of Them Up They're All Rubbish Jesus Says We Are To Be Ingenious Shrewd Cunning Clever For The Sake Of Eternity Not For The Sake Of This World But For The Sake Of Eternity And In Particular For Making Eternal Friends How Would We

Apply This What What Has Jesus Got In Mind Here Well This I Think Is Where The Theme Of Mission In A Sense Is Quite Directly Comes From This Passage It's About Making Eternal Friends It's About Bringing People To Faith In Christ Who Will Share An Eternal Heaven Or Home With Us And All Of God's People That Is It's About Using Our Worldly Wealth For Bringing People To Be Christians Around The World And When We See Friends Here I Don't Think We're Meant To Limit That To People Over The Road Or People We Like A Limited Group Whom We Know It's Actually Establishing Friends In Heaven Primarily Not Simply Friends On Earth If I Can Use Those Expressions For Contrast Now You Imagine Arriving In Heaven Arriving In God's Place The Eternal Home And

Being Welcomed By Such Friends Because Of Your Use Your Clever Use Of Money On Earth What Might That Look Like You Arrive In Heaven To Be Greeted By An Australian School Girl And She Says To You Because Of Your Love In Giving Of Time And Money To Teach Me Religious Education At School I Became A Christian Later In My Life You May Not Even Know That But In Heaven You've Got Another Friend Who Welcomes You To Heaven To Their Eternal Home You Arrive In Heaven To Be Greeted By Your Errant Son Who You Spent Your Life Praying For Loving And Giving But Who Kept Rebelling Against The Faith And Maybe

After You're Gone In A Sense That Person Comes To Faith Because Of Your Steadfast Example Love And Generosity And They Welcome You I Know There's A Sense Of Chronology Difference If You Pre-decease Them But You Get The Picture That's Being Painted Here It's A bit Like Walking Down A Street Or Avenue Or A Cavalcade I Is To You To Be Greeted By A Chinese Man And His Family You May Not Know Them But They Say Because You At Holy Trinity Gave Money To Establish Chinese Ministry In Your Church We And Our Family Became Christians Because Of Your Use Of Worldly Money You This You Arrive In Heaven And You Are Greeted By A Family From Burma

From Myanmar You You You You To Because Of Your Support For The Theological College In Yangon Which Holy Trinity Supports Through OCA That Stuart Will Speak About Soon Our Pastor Was Trained at that college. And he came out to the back blocks of Burma as our pastor and we were converted through his ministry. And it's because of your generosity in Australia funding a college to train him so that after training he came out as our pastor and we were converted.

[27 : 57] We now are your friends in your eternal home with you and us together. It's a very moving image I think. The picture at the end of verse 9. They may welcome you into the eternal homes. Who will welcome you when you arrive there? Who will be out to greet you and saying because of your generosity in giving to send a family from Australia to Nigeria to work for 20 years as a Bible teacher and a doctor? We've become Christians. Will they be people who welcome you because of your generosity? Or people locally? People over the street whom you gave of yourself, of your money, of meals or lifts or whatever because of their needs and they come to faith in Christ? Maybe you know that on earth but maybe you don't know it on earth. I wonder how many friends there'll be who will welcome you to heaven. Jesus is exhorting us here to be shrewd and cunning and I think that means generous with our money now on earth to store up eternal friends.

They may be people we don't know how that money will work on earth. We'll only know when we arrive in heaven. Where there may be people whom we're so surprised to see there or we've never heard of before but because of our ministry, our generosity, our commitment to mission, our support and promotion of the gospel around the world, they'll be out to cheer us into heaven. The thing is of course that shrewdness with money means decisions. We don't have so much money that we can

splash it everywhere.

The needs are far too vast and generosity needs to be accompanied by an element of strategy to think wisely about this is what I've got. How can I best use it for the gospel's sake? How can I most strategically use the worldly wealth that I have, that we have as a church, for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ for eternity? You see our world tells us to make our money work for us now that we need the latest gadget or TV or the better house or the better car or whatever it is now but it's all fleeting. It's all passing away. It doesn't store up for us eternal friends. Jesus is exhorting great generosity here because we can't take our money with us and most of us don't even think shrewdly or cunningly about our wills either for that matter, let alone the money we give away at the time. Jesus is commending here a long-term investment, an eternal investment, money to win converts. For the work of the mission of the gospel in the world, here, abroad, everywhere, at some level or other needs money to support it, to pay for resources and people and ministry.

Jesus is commending an eternal long-term investment that reaps an eternal dividend. They're not the sort of investments that financial advisors will ever advise you on earth, but it's what Jesus exhorts of us.

[31 : 33] And Jesus' advice is, I guess, more reliable too than any worldly advice about financial planning. Remember, because we keep forgetting, in terms of worldly wealth, we here tonight are amongst the richest people in world history.

As generations of adults of my age and upwards, by and large, not every individual, of course, but generally speaking, we have the most luxurious lifestyles of people who've ever lived on this planet. Whilst there are millions of people, as we heard two nights ago from David about the slums of Nairobi, who are thoroughly impoverished, and people in China, the same believers and Christians and Christian pastors, who get paid a pittance compared to what we have.

In Burma, even more so. And yet, on the whole, we're not the most generous people in the world either. For the sake of the gospel, for the sake of mission, for the sake of the glory of Jesus' name, as well as for the sake of eternal friendships, he is exhorting us to be shrewd, cunning, strategic, and generous with our use of wealth.

We may not see much short-term return. Indeed, we may not see any. But we will see long-term, eternal benefit. And that's the dimension that Jesus is asking us to think in.

[33 : 09] May the gates of heaven be lined with new friends for each one of you when we arrive there. Amen.