

How to be Amazingly Rich - Part 1

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[0 : 0 0] principal was giving a talk about leadership, how important it was for the year six to now be the leaders of the school. And he then started to run through, you know, lists, 10 qualities of a leader, 20 things a leader should do. So for example, he said, a leader initiates new ideas.

A leader overcomes adversity. And there I was sitting there, initiate adversity. Oh, those preppies in their second day of school, which, you know, I'm not sure they would get those words.

Perhaps he was targeting the older girls of the school. Maybe that was why he used those words. Anyway, he spoke for about 15 minutes. And even though this was a girls' school, and they were all very well-behaved, you could see some of them starting to fidget and losing their concentration as he was on to his 17th on the list.

But then right at the end, he ended with a story to illustrate his points. And the story he told was called Huwe for Watney Wet. Any of you know that story? It's about a wet or ret who couldn't pronounce the letter R, right?

Now, the contents of the story is not important. What is interesting, though, was to see the students immediately perk up, even the preppies. And they started to engage with the story, so much so that by the end of it, they actually got a thing or two about leadership. They understood. They knew what it was. Not from the lists, but from the story. And that's the power of stories, isn't it? It has this effect not just on kids, but on grown-ups as well.

[1 : 4 0] Well, I've just done it myself, haven't I? I've illustrated the power of stories by using a story. And the power of stories was true even in Jesus' day. He has a way of captivating the audience, of getting them emotionally involved in a way that abstract ideas don't.

As humans, we love stories. We love listening to them, and we love telling them. And so it's no wonder that Jesus also uses stories in his teaching.

They've done some work, and they say that about a third of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels is actually in the form of stories or parables. That's quite a high percentage, isn't it?

And it is these stories and parables that we're going to be looking at up to Easter, leading up to Easter. And by and large, these parables speak of and teach about God's kingdom.

Now, how do we know? Well, if you've been reading through Luke, you would have heard Jesus saying that the aim of his ministry is to preach the good news of the kingdom.

[2 : 4 6] Likewise, when he was giving instructions to the disciples as they were being sent out, first to the 12 and then to the 72, their job was to preach the kingdom. See, when they went into a town, whether they were welcomed or not, they are told to tell the people that the kingdom of God is near.

And if you remember the parable of the sower, Jesus explained the purpose of parables, that it was to reveal the secrets of the kingdom. So chapter 10 and verse 10, don't have to turn to it, I'll just read it.

It says, the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, to the disciples. But to others, Jesus speaks in parables, so that those seeing, they may not see, and those hearing, they may not understand.

So these parables are actually windows into God's kingdom, hence the title of this series. They give us an insight into what God's kingdom is like, secrets, if you like, into the kingdom.

So these are not just stories of how to lead a moral life. Parables are not about that. Rather, they are stories to help us understand the kingdom, how it works, what its values are, what the king is like, and how to enter and enjoy this kingdom.

[4 : 01] And that last point is important, because only disciples of Jesus, Jesus says, will understand the kingdom. Because you actually have to live according to its values in order to understand it.

And as we shall see over the next few weeks, these values are actually counter-cultural. They go against the very grain of how the world normally thinks or lives. So it will be challenging.

But with that, let's begin. And this Sunday and next, we begin with the kingdom's view on wealth. What does it mean to be truly rich in this kingdom? And how do we go about being amazingly rich?

So let's begin with our first parable, which was prompted by a question from the crowd. So we read in verse 13 of Luke 12 that someone in the crowd said to Jesus, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

Now, not much else is given about this person. Was he the older or the younger brother? We don't know. Is he unhappy with his share? Or was he unhappy with the fact that it had to be shared instead of divided cleanly?

[5 : 06] Was the other brother there? None of these details are being given. But often, this is characteristic of what happens when families have disputes.

They would go up to a rabbi, to a teacher, and ask the rabbi to judge or adjudicate between them. But Jesus' reply tells us much of this man's motives.

Firstly, Jesus refuses to buy into this dispute. So he says, or he questions, Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you? He's saying, Look, I don't want to be part of this.

But then he said something to them, to the crowd, to the man, that goes to the man's motives. He said, Watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

You see, Jesus was more interested in the man's heart than in the rights and wrongs of this argument. He was troubled by this man's greed and less concerned about whether he should have got what he was entitled to.

[6 : 11] And this man was so greedy that he was actually willing to put his relationship with his brother at risk for it. His possessions were worth, or these possessions, were worth more to him than peace with his brother.

And so for Jesus, what was at stake was not the inheritance, but this man's soul and the souls of those around him. And so Jesus goes on to pronounce with this parable, telling the story to expand on what he's just said.

So in verse 16, he says, The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop, a bumper crop for the season. And that presents him with a dilemma. He says, What shall I do?

I have no place to store my crops. And so if you're a prudent man, just like he is, he works out that he's actually got to try and preserve the value of his crops. And so Jesus reveals his plans.

I will tear down my barns, he says, and build bigger ones. And there I will store all my grain and all my goods. Now, so far, so good, right? Would you do anything different?

[7 : 15] If you ran out of space, you'd invest in a bigger barn. If you're in the business, and that's what happens. This is a sound business decision, right? Makes good sense. But again, Jesus zeroes in on the thoughts of this man, just like he did with the man in the real life.

And so the man in the story continues by saying, I'll say to myself, you have many good things laid up for many years. Take life easy. Eat, drink, and be merry.

And here it is that Jesus reveals the problem for the man. It was not so much the gift that he got, the bumper crop, but his attitude to the gift that was the problem.

He was putting his trust in the possessions that he got, thinking that his life is now secure, and all he needs to do is sit back and enjoy. Life, in other words, consisted only in the abundance of his possessions, as Jesus had warned, the very attitude that Jesus had spoken against at the start.

His possessions were his security, his way to a comfortable and enjoyable life. And further, look at what he's, it's actually, he's actually full of selfish greed. Just notice as you read it again, verses 19 and onwards, notice how many times he uses the word I and my.

[8 : 33] This is what I'll do. I will take out my barns. I will store my grain and my goods. I'll say to myself, it's all I, I, it's selfish, isn't it?

Just for himself. But this attitude, Jesus says, is foolish. And Jesus doesn't mince his words in verse 20. And so he goes on and says, but God said to him, you fool, you fool.

This very night, your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you've prepared for yourself? All his security was being built on a false premise, wasn't it?

He thought that he owned his own life. This man thought he had full control of his life, but he doesn't even have a single ounce of it. He didn't even have one more day to leave, let alone many more years that he dreamt of.

And really, if we think about it, neither do each of us, do we? None of us has control over our own lives. We could be healthy and happy one day and facing death the next.

[9 : 38] I just announced the sudden news about Bishop Barbara. It's sad, but it also reinforces the point, doesn't it? That life is uncertain. And I think we all know it.

We all know it because we see it happen over and over again to our friends, to our family, or in the news. And yet, I guess, and I include myself in this, many of us don't face up to this fact, do we?

We continue to live as though we are in control, and we continue to build up our possessions as security, thinking that that's what I need to be safe, to be secure.

But if you look at verse 21, Jesus' warning is now broadened out to everyone. He says, this is how it will be. It's not just the rich man, but for anyone who stores up things for himself, but is not rich toward God.

So it's not just the person who dies young, but it's anyone who stores up things for themselves who is a fool, whether they die young or not. And we're fools because we're putting our trust in the wrong things.

[10 : 46] Instead of God the giver, we're putting it in the gifts. Instead of acknowledging that God is the master, we think we are. And if that's how you think, if you rely on your possessions or on your parents' possessions, then Jesus says pretty clearly, you're a fool.

One day, if not now, then very soon you'll realize that it's not worth a thing. When you die, you know, you won't be able to take it with you, just like this rich man. And even while you live, you'll realize that it doesn't bring you the security and happiness that you think it would.

But even amongst all this warning, Jesus gives us another way, doesn't he? He gives us hope and another way of being amazingly rich, where nothing, not even death, will take away, where it doesn't matter when you die, because you'll be rich before you die and you'll be rich after you die.

So what's this way? Well, he says it, it's to be rich toward God. So there's nothing wrong in being rich, but it's, we've got to be rich toward God.

So what does it mean to be rich toward God? Well, it's the opposite, isn't it, of storing up things for ourselves. It's to put our trust in God instead of things. Jesus wants us to be rich in faith, rich in dependence on him, rich in humility, rich in trust.

[12 : 12] That's what we have to be rich in. And it starts, firstly, by putting our trust in Jesus for our salvation, depending on his death for us and humbling ourselves in repentance.

But after we've done that, and we don't stop doing that in one sense, we shouldn't stop there, because the more we entrust our lives to God, the richer we'll be toward him.

The thing, though, is that storing things and being rich toward God don't go together. Why? Because you can't say to God, I trust you totally on the one hand, and then on the other, you're just storing up things just in case.

The very act of storing up something, the craving of the possessions, actually belies your lack of trust in God. If you really trust God, you can't have a backup plan.

That's not trust. So how do we tell that we're really trusting God? Well, in the choices we make. Whenever there's money at stake, ask yourself this question.

[13 : 17] Who wins out? Is it God or is it money? Do you always say yes to another shift of work because there's always more money? Because you don't want to lose out?

Will you never take a lesser paid job to serve God? If money always comes first, then you're not trusting in God. Now, don't mistake what I'm saying. I'm not saying that it's wrong to be rich.

Jesus actually didn't criticize this man because he was rich beforehand or he had a bumper crop. No, he criticized this man only after he revealed what was in his heart.

And if you read the rest of the Bible, there are other rich people in the Bible, like Zacchaeus in the Gospels and Lydia, where they're not criticized for their wealth but commended for their faith. But if your main goal in life is to be rich or to make money, more money, if money is always speaking the loudest in your life, then you've fallen into the attitude of the rich man.

And I want to say that the scary thing is that it's actually very easy for us to fall into that. And the richer we are, the easier it is for us to be tempted like that.

[14 : 26] That's just the power and seduction of worldly wealth. Have you just bought yourself a property? Well, be careful that you don't start watching property prices around your neighborhood.

That's always what neighbors talk about, don't they? What the latest auction results are to see whether your property value has gone up. You've become richer. I remember many years ago when ComSec first introduced online trading.

It's sort of passe now. But I remember buying some shares for the first time online. And as you do, and they prompt you, you set up a watch list, don't you?

You put your shares in a portfolio and then you track your performance. And they make it easy for you to do that. It seemed like a very innocent thing to do at the time, right? But I tell you, it wasn't long before I started to check those prices too often.

Watching my share portfolio go up and down, one cent at a time. It's not a lot of money, is it? It's like \$10, \$20. And yet, you know, that's mesmerizingly, you keep looking at it, thinking how much more money I've just made.

[15 : 26] It's so easy, isn't it, to get stuck. Chinese around. It's Chinese New Year, isn't it, coming up? And for a lot of us, if you understand, you get all these red packets.

It's a big payday, right? But what's going through your mind as you're salivating with those red packets? I don't know. Maybe your parents aren't generous. But if they are, it's going to be a big sort of red packet with lots of money in it.

Are you dreaming about the stuff that you're going to be buying with that red packet? Whenever we experience a bumper crop, whenever we receive a pay rise or anything like that, we actually need to be intentional in how we respond.

We need to be careful, and we need to be intentional. So how do we fall into this trap? Well, a couple of things I suggest. First, we need to be deliberately thankful. That is, always acknowledge that whatever we get are gifts from God.

And these things are not gods in themselves. Tell yourself that. Remind yourself repeatedly. Don't be proud. And if you are, repent immediately. That's the first thing.

[16 : 32] But then secondly, after being thankful, you need to express it tangibly. Be generous somehow to someone in need, to someone in gospel work, a missionary, a CU staff worker, whatever.

But show some tangible sign that you are thankful to God. In the Old Testament, many of you may know that God actually instituted a practice of his people bringing the first fruits of the harvest before God as an offering.

It was a thank offering, which they did actually before they enjoyed the harvest. And actually, God required this of them. And you might think, why? Not because God needed the first fruits. He doesn't need those grain or whatever.

But he instituted that because he knew that his people needed to do it. They needed to be reminded tangibly of their source of blessing.

In actual fact, God even gave them exact words to say every time they brought the first fruits up. So I've got it up there in Deuteronomy 26 and verse 5. We read this.

[17 : 37] Then you shall declare before the Lord your God as they came with their offering. My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous.

But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers. And the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil, and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonder.

He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now I bring the first fruits of the soil, of this land that you've given me, that you, O Lord, have given to me.

See what they were doing? They were reminding themselves and doing something tangible that this was coming from God. Now, we no longer live in the Old Testament, so we don't need to do this.

We don't need to come in next week and sort of do that with our first paycheck. But I think the principle still applies, that it's actually more blessed for us to give than to receive. Why? Because giving actually helps us to trust God.

[18 : 47] It helps us to guard against greed and destruction. Now, don't think, for example, that if you're not rich, that none of this applies to you.

Because notice what Jesus goes on straight to in verse 22. We're not going to cover the whole passage, but I'll just read a few verses. If you think you're not rich and, you know, this rich fool is not you, then look at verse 22.

Where Jesus says, Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. And then if you jump to verse 30, he says, The pagan world runs after all such things, that is, possessions.

And your father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Verse 33, Sell your possessions, don't store them up, and give to the poor.

Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out. A treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted. Where no thief comes near, and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[19 : 50] In other words, Jesus is saying that being poor doesn't stop you from being greedy. It doesn't stop you from envying others. It doesn't stop you from constantly worrying about not having enough.

So if you're poor, you may not be storing up things, but you're actually wishing that you were. And that's the same as being greedy. It's the same trap. It's seeing that life consists of nothing but the abundance of possessions.

And when you worry, you can't be rich toward God, because trust is the opposite of worry. If you're worrying, you're not trusting. So I want to encourage you that if ever you fell into hardship, even though it's hard, be thankful still.

Be thankful because you've just been given an opportunity by God to be rich toward Him, to trust in Him. And most of the times when we are so well off, we don't do these things.

We don't get slapped around the face to be told that actually we need to trust in God. And sometimes only these sort of things that wakes us up and gives us an opportunity to trust in Him.

[21 : 02] Well, friends, I know you've all been waiting to know what that \$500 was for. And I want to ask you whether you actually felt richer when you walked into church today. Anyone felt richer?

Put up your hands. Oh, Dan. How often do you have \$5 in your wallet? Nobody's put up your hands, right?

You're all scoffing in your seats. Why? Well, because you know I've just given you fake money. I've given you monopoly money. You know that if you went to Maya tomorrow, you wouldn't be able to present that note and get an iPad Air for yourself.

Yes, you got \$500 today, but you don't feel any richer because monopoly money is not real money. It's nothing in the real world. Well, the same goes for our physical cash in God's kingdom.

It has no value in God's kingdom. Your physical cash, your assets, whatever you have in your bank balance is like monopoly money to God. It's worth nothing. If you want to be really rich, not just in this life but in eternity, then the only way to be rich is rich toward God.

[22 : 12] Rich in trust, rich in dependence on Him. And to do that, you need to stop, we need to stop idolizing money. Stop making money the goal of our lives. We need to make choices that help us to trust and depend on God more, not less.

We need to think less about money and less about how to get more of it. And if we are to be blessed with a bumper crop, a big pay rise, a bonus, whatever, then we need to be thankful.

We need to be generous. We shouldn't try and use it to make ourselves comfortable but use it to serve God instead. Let's pray. Father, Jesus spoke a lot about money and we're always tempted to just gloss over it.

Forgive us for that. Help us ever to be so vigilant. Help us not to compare with others and think it doesn't apply to us because everyone else in this room is richer than I am.

But help us to respond by being rich toward you. Rich in faith. Rich in dependence.

[23 : 22] And help us to really exercise it by being generous. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.