

Securing Your Future

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 June 2008

Preacher: Paul Barker

- [0 : 0 0] Well, please be seated. And let's pray. Lord God, we thank you that you are a God who speaks to us in and through the pages of the scriptures, the Bible.
- So speak to us now, we pray, from this passage in Luke's gospel. Fill our hearts not only with understanding, but also with faith and trust.
- And we pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let me tell you a story. There was a country that produced abundantly vast mineral wealth and agricultural wealth.
- A mining boom for many years had boosted jobs and created enormous wealth, not only for that part of the country, but indeed throughout. The export markets were booming as well.
- Income was increasing. And at this time of prosperity, there was low unemployment. Most people were able to get jobs.
- [1 : 1 0] The property market was booming as well. Records were regularly being broken in the share market, day after day and week after week. The currency was at an all-time high against some of the major world currencies.
- Taxes were lowering. The government budget was in a massive surplus year by year. And for a decade, the people had never had it so good. And the people said to themselves, well, what should we do?
- How do we store up this wealth? How do we secure our futures? Let us build bigger houses for ourselves. Let us add a holiday house so that we can enjoy our leisure time and weekends.
- Let us buy an investment property that we can rent out and increase our income as well. Let us increase and broaden our share portfolios.
- Let's make sure that we boost our superannuation nest egg so that we're comfortable and secure in our older age. And the people relaxed. The people relaxed in their gyms.
- [2 : 2 1] They relaxed in front of their ever-larger plasma TV screens and home movie systems. The people relaxed in their comfortable holiday houses and on overseas trips.
- The people relaxed wearing the latest fashions in their pools and spas enjoying leisure time. And the people ate and they drank.
- They ate in chic restaurants, in the abundance of gourmet cafes. They drank in the wineries where business increased year after year.
- And the good food guides that directed them to the latest of great cuisine and drink became bigger and bigger as more and more places opened up year by year.
- And of course the people were merry. They were happy. Things were going well. They were comfortable, secure. They were merry at the clubs into the early hours of the morning.
- [3 : 2 0] We've never had it so good, they thought. We've never had it so good, their Prime Minister kept reminding them. But. But someone somewhere said be careful.

Someone somewhere said fool. Someone somewhere said that be careful. The overseas economy is beginning to get troubled and will be affected.

The lending rate problems in other places, they're going to come here. The share market, it's beginning to totter and stagger a little.

There are financial institutions that are in danger of going bust. Fool, because the mortgage rates are rising. And so our wonderful houses and palaces and so on are bought against debt that may become less affordable.

And what's more, the petrol prices are going up. Travel is more expensive. The streets will become more difficult. Public transport more full of people and harder to cope with the system.

[4 : 39] Businesses beginning to go under. The unemployment has just begun to go up. Fool, because so much of this acquisition, this accumulation of wealth has been built on a flimsy debt of cards.

Fool, someone said. Whose will all this be when the repossessioners come? Fool, they say. Whose will all this be when interest rates rise beyond your repayment?

Fool. Whose will all this be when the boom of the shares ends? Fool.

Whose will all this be if your life is demanded of you this day? And so it is for all those who store up treasure on earth for themselves.

For all those whose great dream is the great Australian dream, even the great American dream, the great Western capitalist dream. For all those whose future is so financially secure and rosy, whose barns are full for rainy days, if ever we get any.

[6 : 01] Our world says of such people, well done. Alan Bond remade himself from being bankrupt back in the BRW top 200 or whatever it is.

Well done. But God says, fool. Don't misunderstand this parable of Jesus that he taught, as we heard in the second of the two Bible readings this morning.

Jesus is not saying there's anything wrong in itself with possessions. He's not saying there's anything sinful or wrong in itself of having wealth or prosperity.

He's not saying there's anything wrong with planning for the future, with storing up surplus from one time for a deficit of another time. There's nothing wrong with having a barn or even a big barn, even a full barn.

But the issue is the issue of the heart. Jesus told this story in response to the issue of greed and covetousness, the issue of desire to have more beyond what is needed.

[7 : 11] Jesus is directing the hearers of that story, as indeed he's directing us, the readers of this story, 2,000 years later, to address the issue of where is our heart?

Jesus told this parable finishing, so it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God. And later on in this very same part of Luke's gospel, Jesus says, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The issue is an issue of the heart. Where is your heart's treasure? Where is your heart's desire located?

And in the story that Jesus told, like for so many of us in our world today, our treasure is in the accumulation of our possessions and wealth.

Our world encourages us to crave more, to desire more, to be dissatisfied with the abundance that we have. And we see it even today in people's comments about the economy.

[8 : 31] We really have never had it so good for a decade or more, and yet still there is this undercurrent of dissatisfaction going on time and time again. The advertisements tell us to be dissatisfied, tell us that we won't be satisfied unless we have that product that they're wanting us to buy or to consume.

Our society is just like Oliver Twist. Please, sir, can I have some more? Of course, often we deceive ourselves and others by cloaking our desires in the terminology of need.

I need the latest fashion. I need the latest gadget. I need the latest book. I need the latest bigger house or bigger barn or the latest this, that or the other, whatever it is.

The pressure to consume, the pressure to acquire, the pressure to invest our treasure here on earth is intense and immense in our society. It's almost irresistible.

And Jesus tells this story. Beware, he says at the beginning. Beware of being greedy or covetous. He doesn't issue a warning where no warning is needed.

[9 : 49] He issues the warning, beware, because we and the readers, the hearers of his day, people of any age, actually, in any society for that matter, are in danger of placing our treasure in the wrong place, of placing our treasure in ourselves on earth and not in God.

We're in danger of succumbing to the pressures and the temptations that our society bombards us with day and night all the time.

If you talk to a little child, they have little conception of time. So if you give them a bag of lollies and say, save some for next week or in a few days' time, of course they're unlikely to because they want the lollies, but they're partly unlikely to because they don't have the sense of delay and time.

They can't quite work it out. You know, when are we here? When are we here? When they're driving in a car journey of more than three minutes and so on. But so many of us live like little children.

We live in the world of instant gratification, of immediate satisfaction. We want it and we want it now, immediately. Indeed, some of the advertisers, pick up on this.

[11 : 10] I just saw this week in one of the newspapers advertising a financial institution. Isn't it odd how we can overcompensate for a short trip but do nothing for our longest holiday?

See, it's amazing. It goes on to say in the small print that I can hardly read, how we get carried away with what we might need for a weekend away, but have very little interest in what we might require for the 30 years after we stop earning.

As though that's our destiny. That's the long term, the big picture. And so it's encouraging us to invest with them, treasure on earth in effect, for our post-working life, our retirement.

That's the big thing, the long holidays, it calls it here. My friends, this is short-sighted. This is still at the level of the immediate.

For what Jesus is urging us to do in this story is to think not just of life on earth, that's transient and fleeting, that's short, but to think of an eternal destiny that lasts perfectly forever that is available to us from God.

[12 : 18] You see, life on earth is seize the day. Carpe diem. Today's the day to live for. Who knows what tomorrow will bring, so live for today. Eat, drink, and be merry.

For tomorrow, or the day after, or whatever, we die. So our treasure's for now. Our treasure's on earth. Yes, we might build bigger barns, but it's still short-sighted. It's still for the immediate.

And when we die, well, who knows when? But it's not that far off in the scale of eternity, indeed, for all of us.

People often ask, you know, when somebody dies, what have they left? And who have they left it to? Talking about their will. The answer to that question, what have they left, is the same for every person.

Whether it's the penniless, homeless person in Flinders Street, or Kerry Packer. What have they left? Everything. Because you take nothing with you.

[13 : 22] Remember, Jesus is not describing, not condemning wealth, but he is condemning greed. The short-sighted, covetous desires that place treasure on earth.

Notice how in the story, the man is described. The man who wants to build the bigger barns, the man who's living in a time of abundance, just like we have for the last decade or more.

He's the one who thinks that he's in full command. He's the one who's securing his future. He's the one who thinks he controls his destiny and controls his future.

So he says, they are my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, an emphasis on my, my, my. And at the same time in the story, an emphasis on, I will do this.

I will pull down old barns. I will build bigger barns. I will say this. That is, here's the man, the self-made man who's in control. He's the fulfillment of the great Australian dream.

[14 : 23] This is a man who's made it. This is a man who is where we long to be. As Jesus says, the man said to himself, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. But, as Jesus tells his story, this is a man who has lived as though death is distant.

And he's a fool. For as Jesus tells the story, that very night, his life is required of him by God. This is a man who has lived as though there is no God, as though he is God.

I'm in control. I'm securing my destiny. Fool. This is a man who has lived with himself as his God. He's lived for himself, for his comfort and relaxation and merriment.

Fool. This is a man who has said in his heart, his heart that is located where his treasure is on earth. This is a man who has said in his heart, there is no God.

[15 : 35] And God says, fool. He's lost his soul, forfeited his soul, in order to gain at least some of the whole world.

You see, if we live for this world alone, if our heart's treasure is in this world alone, then in the end, we forfeit our eternal destiny. We forfeit our souls. Well, so be it, you might say.

I'd be satisfied with 70 good years on earth, full of comfort and leisure and wealth and health. That's good enough for me. Is it? What do we miss out on?

And what a life that rejects God. You see, this greed, this investment of treasure on earth is fatal folly. Jesus says, so it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.

Jesus is commending here an investment investment in eternity. He's commending, he is storing up treasures in heaven not on earth. He's storing up being rich towards God, investing time with God rather than ignoring God and pretending that I am God.

[16 : 53] And don't think, Jesus is implying here, as the Bible elsewhere many times makes explicitly clear, don't think that God is simply a sort of benevolent, benign Santa Claus figure who at the end of a life on earth will say, oh it's okay, just come in, come in, you're all welcome.

Fool, he says, that's strong language. Fool, if your treasure is on earth, you are foolish because you've forfeited the possibility of an eternal perfection with God in heaven.

Strong language. Language for those who reject God on earth like this man, well God will say, well I reject you at the end, fair's fair.

If you don't want to have anything to do with me, if you play God on earth, if your treasure is on earth, well that's alright, I'll let you have your treasure there. But the doors of heaven are closed and you're a fool if you live like that.

Is it really foolish? Isn't the dream of heaven just some myth to force out of us some altruistic morality on earth? Is there really something to invest in heaven?

[18 : 12] Yes, there is. God tells us that investing in heaven is investing in something more secure and far safer than the Bank of England, the proverbial Bank of England.

It cannot corrupt or fade. It's imperishable. It's always undefiled. Moreover, it is guarded by God so that nobody can attack it, rust will not destroy it, moths cannot eat it away, thieves cannot steal it.

Moreover, not only is our heavenly investment guarded by God himself, but those who invest in heaven are guarded by God themselves until they arrive in heaven.

It's one thing to say that your investment is guarded by God if you don't make it. But the Bible promises that not only are those investments in heaven guarded by God, but we on earth are guarded by God so that we actually receive the benefit of that heavenly inheritance or investment.

So Peter, who was one of the followers of Jesus in his life on earth, later after Jesus had died, wrote to a group of Christians and said to them that God has brought us new birth to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith, for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last day.

[19 : 46] The investment in heaven is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, whereas everything that we invest in on earth, as the song picked up before, is fading away.

The newest car doesn't stay new very long. The latest fashions are out of date by next weekend. The latest gadgets or books are outdated within days with latest computer technology.

Our investments are being eroded away by taxes or interest rates, and our own lives, of course, are fading away as our outer nature is wasting away through old age, illness, and frailty.

But what the investment of heaven is secure in its value, in its perfection, in its glory, guarded by God, never defiled, never losing value with inflation, and we are being guarded for it.

Can I really believe this? Can I really think this is true? Is this not mere wishful thinking, pie in the sky when I die? Is it really substantial?

[20 : 56] And yes, it is. Because extraordinarily, we see in history, recorded for us in the scriptures, the guarantee of heaven.

It is guaranteed for us because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Unique in history, the grave was empty on that first Easter morning.

My empty tomb doesn't prove resurrection, but later that very day, the dead Jesus was risen. He appeared to many of his followers who knew him. He ate with them, he talked with them, he touched them, he appeared to a whole crowd of 500 at one time, and not just to those who loved him and followed him, to people indeed who were his enemies, who having seen him risen from the dead, changed their whole life orientation around to follow him from being a persecutor to being a believer.

That Jesus who was dead, carrying still the marks on his hands and side and feet of death, was really alive. Death was not the end, death is not the final sentence, death is not the termination of existence, death is not but there is indeed something better, more real, more long lasting.

Indeed this earth and this heaven are passing away, they're fleeting and transient, but there is something greater and bigger and better to invest in and the proof of it is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[22 : 28] So those words of Peter when he said that your inheritance is imperishable and undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, he begins saying it is guaranteed because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

So he says in full, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living, real hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

that's why it's worth investing in heaven. That's why it's worth making sure that your treasure is there and not on earth. Remember, Jesus is not condemning possessions or houses or even wealth, but he is condemning treasure on earth.

It's an issue of the heart. If the heart's treasure is on earth, then it will be greedy for more and never satisfied. But if our heart's desires, longings are in heaven, then they will be satisfied always and forever.

Jesus is saying invest in the resurrection life. Invest in life beyond death, which is not only more long-lasting than life on earth, but it is far, far better, richer, more enjoyable, more satisfying than even the best of life on earth.

[24 : 12] Oh, yes, we've never had it so good, but there is far, far better to come. So how do we do that?

How is it that we place our treasure in heaven? heaven? Well, it may mean for the first time for some people here, talking to God, that's praying, saying to God, God, I realize that I've lived for myself, that I'm the God of my life, that my treasure's on earth, and I realize that that's foolish.

Say sorry to God. Ask God to be your God and put yourself off the throne of God in your life. Ask God to help you change your heart so that your treasure's in heaven, not on earth.

Ask God to help you understand more about what God has done to make heaven possible. You see, the heavenly investment that we can make is not something that we earn, unlike, often, the earthly treasure.

But rather, the ticket of heaven is given to us as a free gift by God. When Jesus died on a cross, he died to bring us forgiveness from God, so that we would be acceptable to God, have peace with God, as the children's song said.

[25 : 41] And that's the greatest gift, the greatest treasure. We don't earn it or deserve it. Freely given from God. God. So we need to ask God to help us live our life holding the ticket of heaven that Jesus offers us.

But if our treasure's on earth, then we're refusing that ticket that Jesus is offering by his death and resurrection. Ask God to change us. Ask God to make us humble so that he is our God and that we're prepared to accept that ticket that Jesus offers us.

It's important to find out more about Jesus. A few minutes of me speaking now may not be yet sufficient for you to convince you about the value of investing in heaven rather than on earth.

I'd encourage you to be part of the course that's starting on Wednesday week, Ideas That Change the World, and pray that those ideas from God's word might change you and your world and your investment as well.

talk to Jonathan or Wayne or myself afterwards. Find out more about what it's like to know God, who he is, what Jesus has done, and how we can follow him.

[26 : 58] Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for the promise of heaven and we pray that you'll help us place our treasure and hearts there.

Help us to resist the temptations on earth. Help us to put aside greed and covetousness.

We thank you that because Jesus Christ rose from the dead, we can have not only a guarantee of the existence of heaven, but indeed a free ticket to enter.

And we thank you for your love and mercy that accepts us despite our failures. Help us to turn from living for ourselves, to turn foot to living for you.

And we pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.