

# Think Ahead

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Preacher: Ian Hamilton

[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn with me in your Bibles if you have one before you and follow with me as we consider this parable of our Lord Jesus Christ, the parable of the dishonest manager or perhaps better, the dishonest steward.

Yesterday afternoon I received a call from a very dear friend in Mississippi. He was attending the funeral of his 27-year-old grandson who had died a few days ago, most probably of a drug overdose.

My friend was heartbroken. The family had gathered, many of them fine, fine Christians, some of them Joan and I know very, very well indeed.

And this friend, who is actually a renowned doctor, spoke to me briefly. We had spoken the day before when I had heard the news and had managed to speak with him.

And his last words to me were these, When you preach tomorrow, preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I said, Will, I seek always to do that.

[ 1 : 22 ] He said, I know, but preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. It was a timely reminder to me that whenever any minister of the gospel stands to proclaim the word of God, His great commission is to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Because wherever you find yourself in the Bible, Jesus Christ is the epicenter. No matter where you're reading in the Bible, the book of Genesis, the book of Deuteronomy, 2 Samuel, Ezekiel, Hosea, the Gospels, Paul's letters, you need always to remind yourself that Jesus Christ is center stage.

He's not a tack-on application to a sermon. He is center stage. The whole Bible, if you like, is an unfolding exposition of Genesis 3.15, where God says to the serpent, Satan in the guise of the serpent, who has wreaked such havoc on God's creation, I will establish enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed.

He, the seed of the woman, will come and crush your head, and you will strike at his heel. And Genesis 3.15 is, if you like, the prototypical text in the Bible.

It sets before us this elemental enmity between God and Satan, between the people of God and the people of Satan.

[ 3 : 05 ] And especially at the heart of that enmity, God's promise that he would one day raise up from the seed of woman a deliverer. Who would crush the head of the serpent.

And all the way through the Bible, what you have really is an unfolding exposition of that promise. And with each successive stage of divine revelation, we're to be asking the question, where is the promise deliverer?

Where is he? Is he come now? The Lord Jesus Christ comes, ultimately, and he comes, not merely to be a teacher, he comes to be a saviour.

He comes to crush the head of the serpent. He comes to vanquish Satan and rescue from him an innumerable company of men, women, boys and girls to deliver them from darkness into light, from death into life.

And so when we read through the Gospels, we're not simply to read of the Lord Jesus Christ, exercising demons, healing the sick, curing the blind, raising the dead, feeding the multitudes, as if these were discrete episodes and occasions that we're intended to marvel at.

[ 4 : 36 ] No, because in all of these things, Jesus is displaying himself as the promised one who has come. These were the signs and marks the Old Testament said would delineate the life of the one that God has ordained in the power of his spirit to vanquish the evil one and to bring salvation to the world.

And so we come to this parable which is headed in the ESV version, the parable of the dishonest manager. He's really a steward. And you know what a steward is. He was someone who had responsibility for his master's household. He was the overseer. He was given great responsibility. And we read in this parable of our Lord Jesus Christ of a rich man who had a steward and charges were brought against the steward. He's been acting dishonestly. He's been squandering. Now I've used that verb deliberately. The ESV says in verse one, he was wasting his master's possession. But it's the exact same verb that you find in the parable of the prodigal son in the previous chapter at verse 13. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all that he had, took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered, wasted his property in reckless living. [ 6 : 14 ] And I think Luke is intending that we see here a connection between the prodigal son who squanders his father's resources in reckless, riotous, ungodly living. And this more respectable, but nonetheless equally sinful man who squanders his master's wealth for his own ends. In other words, you can be a flagrant, public sinner that everyone points to and says you won't believe what he or she has been up to. Or you can be a more private, cultured, cultivated, hidden sinner, respectable, that hardly anyone knows that you actually have the same heart as the more reckless public sinner who's squandering his father's wealth. Sin can be egregious in public or it can be private and hidden and respectable. I ministered for 17 years in Cambridge, probably the most renowned academic city in the world. People are very cultured, very educated, many of them very refined. And behind the veneer of education and refinement and culture, there were hearts at enmity with God. [ 7 : 45 ] They were as much in need of the salvation of God as the poor people who were begging on the streets of Cambridge, of whom there were not a few. This mismanager, this steward, is discovered. The game is up. And the master calls him and says, your time is up. I can't any longer have you wasting my resources, squandering my resources. Now here we come to the heart of the parable. The steward thinks, well, what am I going to do? I'm not fit to dig ditches. When I'm removed from management, I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm not strong enough to dig. I'm ashamed to beg. And then he has this idea. Ah, he says. And that's what the Greek text actually says. Ah, I've got an idea. I know what I'm going to do. [ 8 : 51 ] So he calls in his master's debtors, those who owe the master various things. And he says to one, what do you owe my master? Oh, he says, I owe a hundred measures of oil. Here he says, score that out and write down 50. Oh, oh, I'm halving my debt. Very good. Okay. Calls on someone else. What do you owe my master? Oh, he says, I owe a hundred measures of wheat. Okay, he says, take the bill and score out a hundred, write down 80. Oh, well, there you go. At a stroke, 20% off my debt. He's being deceitful, isn't he? He's being wicked. He's stealing from his master. And then Jesus says, the master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness. [ 9 : 57 ] The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness. Now, notice what the text doesn't say. It doesn't say the master commended the steward. steward as such. He's dishonest, and the master knows he's dishonest, but the master says to himself, hmm, there's no flies on this steward. He's looking ahead. He's going to get the sack, but he's looking ahead. He's thinking to himself, I need to do something so that, verse, what is it, verse 4, I will be received into people's houses. I won't be a pariah. I won't be excluded from society and from social invitations. I need to do something. And so he concocts this scheme to put himself in the good graces of his master's debtors. And the master says, hmm, he's been looking ahead. He's been looking ahead. And then Jesus says, for the sons of this world, literally of this age, are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

[ 11 : 29 ] You see what Jesus is saying. He's saying to the sons of light, to his disciples, to believers, he's saying to them, you've got something to learn from the wicked.

He's saying, well, I've got nothing to learn from the wicked. Oh, you have, says Jesus. You have. I tell you, said Jesus, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon.

That's the word. Not just wealth. Mammon can mean possession, not just money, but wider than that. Make friends of unrighteous mammon so that when it fails, when it runs out, when all your resources are gone and kaput, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

now, what on earth is our Lord Jesus Christ teaching his disciples? He's clearly not teaching them to be dishonest, obviously.

So what is our Lord teaching them? He's saying to them, you have resources. resources. All the resources we have, in a sense, are unrighteous.

[ 13 : 00 ] They're tainted by the fallenness of this world. There is nothing pure as such under heaven. Everything we have has been tainted. And Jesus is saying, what are you going to do with the resources God has given you?

Are you going to use them wisely or unwisely? The dishonest steward, he had resources and he used them wisely within his unrighteousness.

He looked ahead and he thought, right, I'm going to use the ability I have and the resources I have to make sure that when I'm sacked, there will be people who still welcome me into their home.

And so Jesus says to his disciples, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, unrighteous mammon.

How can you do that? What on earth does that mean? Well, this is what our Lord is saying. God has given you resources. Why is God giving you money, large or small?

[ 14 : 12 ] Why is he giving you homes, big or small? Why is he giving you anything you're a steward? You don't possess one iota of anything.

You don't. I don't. Everything you have and I have, we have as a gift of God's grace to use for his glory and for the good of others. We've just bought a house in Inverness.

But the truth is, what do we buy it with? Unrighteous mammon. That God provided for us in his kindness and mercy.

When we pray, Lord, everything I have is yours, do we really mean that? Jesus is saying, you are stewards, therefore use what you have, large or small, big or little, use your resources to win people, to make friends, so that they will welcome you ultimately into the eternal dwellings.

Now I think what our Lord is saying is this, that use the resources God has given you for the cause of the kingdom of God in this world, for the spread of the gospel, so that people might be saved and become the friends of God and your friends, so that when your resources dry up and run out and you die and go to heaven's glory, there will be people there to welcome you and to say to you, as it were, I am here because you didn't hoard up your resources.

[ 15 : 52 ] You used them as a steward, you used them wisely, you thought ahead. You see, we can't take anything with us. There are no pockets in a shroud, are there.

And it doesn't matter whether we've got a lot or a little, that's irrelevant actually. Whether we've got one pound in the bank or one million pounds, that's irrelevant. The issue is, what are we doing with the resources God in his grace has given to us?

Jesus says, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when you go to heaven, there will be people saying, you don't know me.

I was raised in Azerbaijan or Afghanistan or the east end of Glasgow, it doesn't matter where. And your giving enabled someone to come to my homeland to tell me about Jesus and the salvation of God in his son.

God in heaven. That's why Jesus goes on, one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.

[ 17 : 12 ] If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you true riches? If you're not using the resources God has given you wisely and evangelistically, we might say, why should God entrust greater riches to you?

And you know what the greater riches are, the riches that money can't buy. Why should God entrust to you greater godliness, holiness of life, usefulness in ministry, in service?

If you're not using the material resources God has given you wisely and evangelically, why should God entrust to you greater riches?

So what is our Lord Jesus Christ teaching here? Three things, just briefly. Number one, live in the light of eternity.

This is the point between the sons of darkness and the sons of light. This dishonest steward looked ahead. There was a day coming and he looked ahead and made provision for it.

[ 18 : 36 ] Jesus is saying to his disciples, look ahead, there's a day coming, be prepared for it. Be ready for the coming of the Lord. Be ready for the day when the eternal dwellings beckon.

You see, Jesus wants us to know that by their fruit we will be known. Our Christianity is not simply to be confessional. Our Christianity is to be transformational.

Our lives are to show that the gospel of Jesus Christ has captured and captivated the citadel of our hearts. that the way we behave shows that the gospel has come to take saving root within us.

Live in the light of eternity. About maybe 30 years ago when I was a parish minister in New Mills in Ayrshire, we were visited at our midweek prayer meeting by just a wonderful couple from France, Matt and Margaret Payton, they've now spent 55 years I think church planting in France.

Simple couple. They've got very little educational background but God has used them wonderfully. And I remember something Matt quoted. It wasn't great poetry but it was great theology.

[ 20 : 06 ] Only one life, soon it must pass, only what's done for Jesus will last. You know that's not great poetry but my is it great theology.

Only one life, soon it must pass. I was saying to Joan, was it last night, I can hardly believe I've turned 67. I feel internally 37 then I look in the mirror and I think oh dear, I can hardly believe where the last 30 years have gone.

Only one life, soon it must pass, only what's done for Jesus will last. Live in the light of eternity.

Look ahead. Be like the unjust, dishonest steward, not in his dishonesty but in his shrewdness.

Look ahead. The second thing, we're all stewards. I need to tell you something this morning. Maybe you know this.

maybe you don't, but I will tell you, you do not possess one iota of anything.

[ 21 : 21 ] Maybe you're thinking, oh, you don't know the money I've gotten in Mr. McLennan's bank. I don't care. It's not yours. That's just the truth of it.

It is not yours. you don't possess the hat you're wearing, the shoes you're wearing, the tie, the home, the cutlery you'll use at lunchtime, the plates you do not possess one single thing.

Everything you have, you have as a gift of God's kind grace. You're stewards. I'm a steward. And to whom much is given, much will be expected. And the Lord will say to us one day, what did you do with the resources I gave you?

Well, Lord, I don't know what I did. Now, I'm not saying we're not to use the resources we have for our own pleasure.

God gives us all good things richly to enjoy. I'm not saying for one moment, don't misunderstand me, don't go on holidays, don't buy a new car, don't do this, don't do that. That is not what I'm saying.

[ 22 : 33 ] God gives us all good things richly to enjoy. we're to be thankful for all the good things we have, but at the heart of it, do we realise that everything we have, we have as a steward?

see, Christianity is all of grace, not just salvation. What do we deserve?

I have a friend who regularly sends me emails and at the bottom of his email every single time he writes this, all of grace, all of grace.

grace. And you know what grace is? Undeserved kindness to judgment, deserving sinners. It's all of grace.

We're stewards, live as stewards. And then thirdly, Jesus is teaching his disciples that Christian giving and Christian serving is sacrificial and not proportional.

[ 23 : 38 ] in the old covenant, the tithe was the proportion that was to be given to the Lord, not just the tithe, there were tithes and offerings.

Seems to me in the new covenant, while the tithe may be a helpful guide for us, giving and living are expanded. We're to give all that we have and all that we are.

Why? Because the Son of God loved us and gave himself for us. It's the cross of Jesus Christ that is the great persuasive.

When people are giving miserly to the cause of the kingdom, cajoling them isn't the way. You point them to the cross.

See what God has done for you. See the extravagance of his love to you. See how much he has given to you in the sacrifice of his Son.

[ 24 : 42 ] Can you give any less than all that you are? You know, after Paul's great exposition of the gospel in Romans 1 through 11, how does he begin chapter 12? Therefore I beseech you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice.

sacrifice. But you will never do that, and I will never do that until what God has done in the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross penetrates into the very heart and soul of our being.

Christian giving is sacrificial, not proportional. We can never be content by saying, well, I've done my bit, I've given my tithe.

Some people are able to give tithes and not miss a penny of it, because they've got so much. For other people, a tithe will be an extravagance, because they've got so little.

I remember visiting an old lady in New Mills in my first charge. Mrs. Willis came to faith at 75. She told me once, no one ever told me I needed to be born again.

[ 26 : 01 ] She'd been in church from the age of five till 75, and she had never heard you must be born again. I went to visit her one day, and I would visit her regularly.

She just was a delight to visit. I'm sure I visited for my benefit as much as for hers. And she was chatting and she was very frail, and she wanted to make sure that her giving went to the kirk.

Every week, she tithed her pension. And then whatever she had left over, she gave that as well.

And I wanted to say to her, you know, Mrs.

Willis, you're being too generous. and I thought, you know, Ian, she just would look at you bewildered, bewildered if you said that.

You're exposing yourself. This is not a sermon, I hope, that makes you go away thinking, oh, he thinks we're not giving enough.

[ 27 : 08 ] I have no clue what you're giving. I want you and I want me to go away saying, Lord, what you have done for me in the giving of your Son, Jesus Christ, requires my everything and my all.

To give you less than every particle of my being and every iota of what I possess and have would be an affront to the cross of your Son.

So when Paul says we preach Christ and him crucified and you look at his letters, you think, Paul actually believes that preaching Christ and him crucified has got to do with things like giving to Corinthians 8 and 9 and much else besides.

Because it is the cross, the loving kindness and mercy of God and the giving of his Son, that is the one reason that is to shape and style all that we are and all that we do.

So if someone says, why do you help in Sunday school in point and knock? Why do you serve at the door? Why are you helping with the Sunday school outing?

[ 28 : 38 ] Why do you deliver this or do that or make cups of tea? The answer, the answer, and let's not be afraid to say it, is because the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

Tis the least I can do. So said Jesus, learn from the unjust steward, not his unjustness, but that he looked ahead and wouldn't it be a great thing if you were welcomed into the eternal dwellings by people you've never met and never heard of, but who will say to you, I am here because God used the kindness of your generosity to bring the gospel of his mercy and love to my homeland.

May God bless to us his word this morning. Amen.