

Make Friends for Yourself

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads and pray just as we stand. Father, as we think about these amazing words of the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray that you would speak to us, show Jesus to us, and give us the freedom and joy that he intends for us.

For we ask in his name. Amen. Please sit down. Well now, if you'd like to take your Bible and follow along, we're on page 75 near the back, Luke chapter 16.

If you are a visitor at St John's today, you should know that we, Sunday by Sunday, go through books of the Bible consecutively.

And for some time now, we've been looking and having the wonderful joy of looking at Luke's Gospel. What that means is the passages set the agenda for us as a congregation.

This is very important for me to say at the beginning. It's not that the preachers get together and during the week they say, I've got something very important. I really want to get off my chest to the congregation.

[1 : 14] I want to find a passage to hang it on. No, no, no. We try and find out what God is saying in the passage and then say that. Now I say that at the beginning of this sermon because this passage is all about money.

And we have not chosen this because of the financial crisis. We haven't chosen it because of our budget concerns. We haven't chosen it because of the legal defense fund, which you're going to hear about at the end of church today.

But we hear about it because this is the next thing Jesus said after chapter 15 and the parable of the prodigal son. In fact, one of the very troubling things for us or for me as a preacher is that Jesus speaks about money much more often than I'm comfortable with, frankly.

He speaks about it one out of every seven verses. So if I was following Jesus' priorities, I guess that means I'd have to preach on money once every seven weeks, which I don't do.

Or if we had a passage of 35 verses, maybe I should mention money seven times, or five times. My math is bad. It's not really about money.

[2 : 32] It's about liberty. It's about Jesus doing something very profound in us. And because it follows these three parables that Jesus has just told about a lost sheep and a lost coin and a lost son, which tell us how God feels about us and why Christ has come and the joy in heaven when anyone turns to him in repentance.

And now we come into chapter 16 and salvation is not some airy-fairy thing on a cloud, but it has to do with the reality of what we do with our money.

I put it differently. Jesus says you can tell whether someone's faith is real by looking at their checkbook. And Jesus is not saying this to make us feel guilty.

He doesn't need our money. He's doing something far deeper. There are two sections of the story, verses one to nine, and then the second half. And the first heading I've called The Best Place to Put Money.

The Best Place to Put Money. No doubt you will have had a lot of people giving you advice over the last few months. They certainly have me about the best place to put money. The one that comes up more than anything else is take it out of the bank and put it under a mattress.

[3 : 51] What Jesus does here is he takes an example from everyday life and he speaks to his disciples. And the example is about a dishonest steward. And if you look down at verses one and two of chapter 16, the story opens with a massive crisis for this steward.

He is the manager of a rich man's household. He's managing stuff that's not his own. It's someone else's. And he's given great freedom, but he's been caught squandering, wasting his master's stuff.

And so the rich man, the owner, calls him in and says to him, you're fired. You're sacked. You're done. Get your accounts in order.

Give me the books by the weekend. It's a huge crisis for this man. What am I going to do, he says. I'm not strong enough for manual labour. I'm ashamed to be a beggar.

I have a very narrow window of opportunity to provide for my next phase of life. Basically, he says, life is over. And then he suddenly comes up with a plan.

[4 : 59] And it's audacious. And it's brilliant. And it's risky. In verse four, the plan is going to achieve what he really wants. And that is, he's going to create a situation for himself after this phase of life.

He's going to make a future for himself. When he's kicked out of this house, he's going to be received into other people's houses. And so in verses five to seven, he goes into action swiftly and secretly.

This is what he does. He brings in all his master's debtors, one by one, and he writes down their debt. Sometimes 50%, sometimes 20%.

And in every case, he's doing a massive favour for each of these people. It can't be reversed. And at the same time, he's making the master look pretty good in the same moment.

It's brilliant. Before he turns in the books, he uses their debts to put them in his debt. So in verse eight, when the master discovers what he's done, he is amazed and impressed.

[6 : 06] Not by the steward's dishonesty, but by his shrewdness, by his cunning. The master knows he can't go back on those deals without looking like a greedy amateur.

He's been outwitted by the cleverness of his dishonest steward. He's not happy, but he's impressed at the astuteness of the steward. And then Jesus makes one comment, and he gives one command in verses eight and nine.

Look at the comment, verse eight, halfway through that. Jesus says, for the sons of this world, that is those who are not disciples of his, are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light, believers.

What he's saying is that Christians, Christians are not very good at making the most of the opportunities given to us. We're not very shrewd. We're not very thoughtful.

I don't know if you knew that Jesus thought that about us. And then he says in verse nine, I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal habitations.

[7 : 26] Is that clear? Well, let me tell you what Jesus does not mean. He does not mean that we can or should buy people.

He's not encouraging us to be mercenary and create rice Christians. He's not saying, be dishonest and manipulative with your money. He's saying, use your money not to create an eternal habitation for yourself, but so that others will welcome you into the eternal dwellings.

An unrighteous mammon, it's just money, stuff of this world. And Jesus says, one day it will fail. It will come to an end. When this world is no more and Christ brings the new creation, there will be no money.

Jesus is saying, and I think this is remarkable, there is a way to take our money and to use it for something that will last forever.

That using it in this way, that we can transform dollars into something that reaches beyond this world into eternity so that when our world is past, the effects of the use of your money will go on and on forever in the lives of other people.

[8 : 47] Let me give you an example. Here is a woman who in 2008 gave money to the Cambodian, to the Ratanak ministry in Cambodia.

One of the projects that Ratanak has in Cambodia is in the toughest prison there. Christians are welcome because prisoners are regarded as fairly worthless. And so the Christians have an open door to take in literacy skills and training and Bible groups.

Here is a letter translated from Khmer. It's from a young man who is serving 20 years for multiple murder. He talks about the Christian who came in and he said, he encouraged me and gave me hope that I could live a good life in prison.

This caused me to study God's word more. I became joyful. Nowadays, I have a good life because I've been changed and I'm free from the power of sin. I feel sorry for my past.

I thank God for blessing me and loving me despite my bad past. I have none to depend on, only God in whom I trust. When that Vancouver woman gets to heaven, she will not just be welcomed by

Jesus but by smiling Cambodian faces who will say to her, thank you for helping us to come here. [10:11] It's the complete reversal of risk. It's the very best place to use your money because we can invest money in something most precious which will outlast this world using our money so that others will enter into the eternal habitations.

Jesus is not saying we're saved by giving money. He's offering us a way to participate in what God is doing. This is very important. There's no one-to-one correspondent relationship.

There's no mercenary economic equation where you give one dollar and this happens. When you give to gospel work, to Christian work, you lose control of your money but God takes it and places it into some sort of thing that he is doing.

Now you know that there are Christians who have tried to degrade what Jesus is saying. I remember a couple of years ago listening on radio to an evangelist who said for every \$29.95 one soul is saved if you give it to this ministry.

I think that's disgusting. In the 16th century the Roman Catholic Church sold indulgences, which meant you got time off purgatory for a certain price.

[11:27] That is not what Jesus is saying. He's saying we need to be shrewd with our money and that it is possible to invest our money in such a way that it will reach beyond our chronological existence into the next life and it will affect the lives of others for eternity and the best way to do that is to invest your money in gospel ministries.

Let me give you an illustration which is a little bit closer to home. Last Sunday at the 9 o'clock service I had the great pleasure of visiting the Sunday school and they were doing the transfiguration of Jesus and they were acting it out and various Sunday school teachers were dressed up as Moses and Elijah and the disciples and Jesus and they gathered the children at the bottom of the stairs over in the hall as the stairs were the mountain on which the glory would come down and they had a great white curtain of gauze that came down the mountain as a cloud and wouldn't you know it just before the 9 o'clock the CD player which had the recording of the voice of God broke down so they needed someone to play the voice of God and I was very willing and I did a pretty good job and as I stood at the top of the stairs and I looked down through the gauze the children's faces were transfixed as the play was acted out and I don't think those children will soon forget the lesson that they learned and the reason

I tell you that is that every dollar that you put in the offertory plate for St John's part of that goes to pay for our Sunday school staff that week by week work over the lesson work over the scriptures seek to support the volunteer teachers so that the children will learn Christ and one day in eternity if you give to St John's even you will not just be welcomed by Christ you will be welcomed by children who will say thank you for helping us come to this heavenly habitation Jesus is not talking about digging deep and being sacrificial there's no there's no talk here about amounts he's just talking about being shrewd if you believe Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost if you believe he's come bringing the kingdom and that one day that kingdom will take over and bring the new creation all Jesus is saying is this is putting your faith into practice he's saying there is a way to send your money ahead of you if you will into eternity to transform money from being just something of this world into something that creates a community of love in eternity

I think it's amazing I mean it's just almost beyond imagination that we can take the things that God has given us and use them so that precious people can come to know the Lord Jesus Christ can come to know salvation this is far more than just giving to the poor if you are a Christian that's part of your duty and responsibility this is much bigger this is taking stuff money and giving it with faith and hope and love to the work of the gospel so that men and women and boys and girls might come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and welcome you into their heavenly habitations I think this is amazing Jesus is offering us a way to make an eternal difference with our money with the money that belongs to this world to do something for other people that will change them not just in this life but forever something that no wealth in all the world can buy but with God's help it can happen and it's not a sacrifice he's just talking about being spiritually shrewd and smart and that's the first point the best place to put your money and the second point why why is that the best place look down at verse 11 and 12 please if then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon who will entrust to you the true riches and if you have not been faithful in what is another's who will give you that which is your own for everyone who follows

Jesus we know this that everything we own every cent every investment fundamentally does not belong to us it belongs to God we are like managers we are like stewards and we will answer to him

for how we use it do you remember last week in the story of the prodigal son the prodigal son goes to the father and he says I want my inheritance now and he takes the money and he goes off and he spends it in wild living and here's the thing every cent he spends every party he throws every substance he abuses he is using the father's money every cent he is using without reference to the father exactly the same with the steward his life is about managing the resources that belong to another person he's squandering what's not really his and if you belong to Jesus Christ you know that what we have does not fundamentally belong to us it was given to us by God in the first place this is very important some people give out of duty some people give money because that's what good people do but those who follow Jesus

[17:12] Christ know that we're actually giving back to God what belonged to God in the first place and Jesus is saying there is a deeper dimension here verse 13 no servant can serve two masters either he will hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other you cannot serve God and mammon now every religion teaches that there's danger in money what's radical about this is that Jesus says money exercises a spiritual power over us and in the original it's even stronger it says literally no slave can serve as a slave for two masters you cannot be a slave of God and mammon I don't want to embarrass him but Craig Gay who's sitting over there has written an absolutely tremendous book called Cash Values Money and the Erosion of Meaning in

Today's Society I bought this on special for less than half price but I'm going to get Craig to sign it so it's worth even more this is an extremely stimulating and probing look at the place of money the new role that money has begun to play in the last several hundred years with apologies to Craig he says that in our industrial economy we have succeeded in placing money in a new role it's brought us the highest standard of living in history we're better fed better educated we have more consumables more leisure time than our ancestors and what we've done we've done this by elevating money to a new role where money is the measure of everything else so we can transform everything else into money we can transform goods and services and relationships and marriage and justice it's all now exchangeable in terms of money and the culture has become like a large gambling casino where there is no meaning apart from money we've exalted the money unit stripped things of beauty and grace altered our spiritual ambition bowed down as slaves and the bible teaches you know that god is our creator the loving heavenly father made us that the world in which we live is not an accident it hasn't happened by chance and that everything that we have is a gift from him your abilities your talents they belong to god he's given them to you to be used to serve him but here is what happens god gives us these good things all sorts of good things and what we begin to do is we start to worship the good things instead of god we exchange god for the good things and we say this is the ultimate good for me this is going to have my loyalty and my affection and my service and my delight and my fear and if we build our lives around anything other than god himself we become slaves because the gifts of god are not god they cannot give us what god does and Jesus warns us here that there is a particularly deceptive spiritual power in money it whispers promises into our ears it says i can make you happy i can fulfill your desires i can make you secure just bow down and worship me don't believe what Jesus is saying you can worship god and me at the same time part of the deceptive power of money is that i've never met anyone who thinks they worship money if you don't think this is a spiritual danger for you Jesus is saying you are deceived to be a human being is to be a worshipper that's how god has made us and if we worship anything other than god doesn't matter if it's career or approval or success or money we turn back on god and we end up in slavery and that is why Jesus has come he's come to bring us release and liberty he's come to seek and to save the lost and one of the most intractable and invisible and insidious ways to be lost is to be a slave to mammon that is why Jesus went to the cross as he dies on the cross Jesus goes into the deepest spiritual prison overpowers everything that takes us has taken a slave and rescues

those who trust in him he gives himself over to captivity so that he might liberate us and i tell you you know this mammon it's powerless it's powerless to bring you forgiveness it's powerless to give you meaning it's powerless to show you the face of god it cannot do anything for us in eternity by itself but in his death Jesus purchases for us an eternal home that is beyond our imagining and in saying this Jesus himself is the connection between the next world and this world we enter this world by him and such is the power of his death and resurrection not only does he free us but he makes it possible for us to participate with him in the work of seeking and saving the lost

you notice in the prodigal son we don't discover what it cost the father to welcome the son home but if you read on through luke's gospel jesus walks all the way to jerusalem and he gives his magnificent life on the cross so that we will be freed and released from slavery he says you cannot serve god and mammon and how do we demote mammon from being god it is a lifelong process of repentance and what we need to do is we need to take our checkbooks and bring them to the cross of christ do people use checkbooks still these days take your visa card then whatever it is we need to bring our finances to the cross of christ we need to open them up before him and acknowledge to him that we have been bewitched and beguiled by money that we love money and we trust money and we live amongst people who love money we haven't trusted him and loved him as we should and ask him to free us ongoingly more and more and to be our master and then do one concrete thing take out your checkbook and offer it to god and thank him for the wonderful possibility the amazing possibility that we can use money for the same purpose that jesus has come to seek and to save the lost pray that we'd be spiritually shrewd with our money and that is the way to demote it by giving generously to the work of the gospel to make an eternal difference in the lives of others and as we do that jesus is saying we begin to taste the joy of true freedom well let's kneel and pray and bring this to god father we thank you this morning through the certain hope that you have given us as we prepare to celebrate the death of jesus help us to understand its significance and to rejoice in both it and the resurrection as we live in a world that converts happily towards eternal death and destruction help us as we try to orient its people back to the cross and the need of repentance lord in your mercy we thank you for answering our prayers for methern we thank you so much for blessing his witness to jesus and his saving grace let us have the same eagerness as we interact with our co-workers our friends family and neighbors we thank you that you're interested in the lost of our world and that you sent jesus to seek and save us as we rejoice at lunch today help us to understand that it's only a small representation of what goes on in heaven when we repent and return to you our loving father lord in your mercy and now lord as we heard in the sermon this morning we asked for wisdom regarding the reality of our money may we not squander what you have given us give us insight into how you want each one of us individually to invest in your kingdom especially in our church and in gospel ministries father help us to be spiritually shrewd to manage the resources you have given us for you wake us up if we are worshipping good things instead of you the giver help us to get our minds and priorities straight keep us from enslavement to mammon and help us to bring our riches to the cross of christ so that you can help it our riches seek and save the lost lord in this crucial area of our life in your mercy we ask for our missionaries in the cities particularly this morning for paul ratsloth of the lighthouse marion maxwell serving in the genesis program and for dan and fran gow in seeds of hope we ask that you keep them safe and use their faithfulness to bring those they work against they work for or work amongst to you we ask for your healing power to all who are sick and needy and this morning we think especially of ron harold paul jean lee and ben and in a moment of silence we ask for those we know personally who need healing lord in your mercy and finally lord we ask for your protection during the coming week keep us safe deliver us from evil help us to bear in mind that it's not cards eggs or bonnet that easter is about but rather our lord jesus christ to him be all honor and glory amen so we ask for to m we ask for your

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