

Act Now For Time is Running Out

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- [0 : 0 0] There was a very rich man, rich in the way that everybody envied him, and he had entrusted his business to a manager, and in the course of a delightful Hawaiian holiday, a business associate said to him, Do you know what your manager is doing to you while you're sitting here under this palm tree? So indignant was the rich man that he sent a wire to his manager and said, I'm arriving in the morning. I want an accounting. You're through. So the manager had less than 24 hours to deal with probably the greatest crisis of his life, and he dealt with it in an altogether admirable way. In fact, so admirable was the way that he dealt with it that when his master returned from Hawaii, he said, well done, even though he had sustained considerable losses. Because the manager had gone to all his debtors, had reduced their debts in some cases by as much as 50%, but he had dealt with them all. He took the account to his master, who had fired him the day before, and he said, here it is. You want an accounting? Here it is. He said, here it is.
- [2 : 0 4] You tear at it. You tear at it and you dig at it until you find out what it might be saying. Because this parable comes, as Luke records, from the very lips of Jesus Christ. And it's a shock tactic that he uses. The first shock he uses is, in our language, a man is handed a pink slip. He's through. He's through. A large and reputable stocks and bonds company in Toronto, so I've heard, is in the habit of handing out slips in the late afternoon. And when the man reads the slip and leaves at 5 o'clock, he comes back in the morning to find that the lock on his office has been changed and all his personal effects are neatly piled outside the door. And the message is complete. He's finished. He's finished. Well, that's the first shock we get. The second shock we get is that this man, instead of folding up under this, makes some very rapid calculations and starts acting very quickly.
- [3 : 2 0] He's probably lucky he didn't have a computer and a telecommunication system that he had to contend with. It gave him a little time. And so he goes and he reduces all the paper debts that all the debtors of his boss, all the debtors owe to his boss. And the third thing he does is, and the third kind of shock is, why does the boss come back and commend the unjust steward for what he's done? Then even worse than that, Jesus commends him too and says, you've done well. Now, by this time, I hope all our sensibilities are offended. But I take very special delight in this story. It really helped me. I mean, I've wondered about it for years, but I'm to the point where I really don't know anything that I've looked forward to telling you about so much recently is this story. And I heard the other day of a company that was prepared to put a million dollars investment into a project which has promise, but which still has to be proven.

[4 : 42] And I thought, gosh, a million dollars. Then I heard that the same company put a million dollars, more or less at the same time, into nine other projects. And their expectation is that nine of those projects will fail and the one will make money to cover the debts to all of them.

Now, that's very admirable to my way of thinking. I really think that's a great scheme, and it probably keeps our private enterprise system going. It's that kind of aggressive business attitude that seems to be very much honored in this parable.

I don't know anybody whom I've met, no matter how sanctified they may be, who pours over their accounts for the last year to see if there isn't some way they can send the government a little more money on their income tax.

I don't know anybody who doesn't see the logic and reason of saying, the man I work for has millions, and I can scarcely feed my family.

I think maybe I'll deal with this in a way which is a little bit close to the wire. And that's what happens in our society. We have a general understanding.

[6 : 12] A young man whom I met once upon a time in downtown Vancouver, and I expressed to him my shock at some of the business dealings that he was involved in.

And I said, how come these people can get away with that? Oh, and he said to me, the market is self-correcting. You get away with whatever you can, and if you don't get caught, you win.

He reminded me of Kingston Penitentiary, where it was well known that the only crime anybody in there had committed, the only serious crime against a corrupt society as they saw it, their only crime was that they had been caught.

And that's the picture that's right at the heart of this parable. Well, the lovely thing about it is that Jesus shows that he understands the way the market works, the way the dog-eat-dog world of business works.

And he called it dishonest. He said the very means by which it works is the God who is money.

[7 : 36] And that lovely New Testament phrase, the mammon of unrighteousness. He said the thing is dishonest, that it works on the mammon of unrighteousness.

But he also said it's inescapable. You can't keep your hands clean. You can't live apart from it.

You know that Christians have been very anxious to avoid sex and money by celibacy in monasteries. They try and get around the problem, thinking that if they can deal with those two problems in their lives, there's nothing else that they seriously have to worry about.

And Jesus doesn't say anything to that effect as far as I know. I think he says in both those areas, you're going to get involved and you're going to be defiled.

If not by your actual things that you do, it's by the things that you think. These two realities in your life are going to defile you and do you quite a lot of damage.

[8 : 43] But you can't avoid them. That's the kind of world that you're living in. Now he doesn't call it right or just or virtuous.

In this case, he calls it dishonest. But he also says it's inevitable. He says it's inevitable. So what are you going to do with it? And that's what he goes on to explain to us, what you're to do with it.

He admired the people who knew exactly what their situation was. He admired these people who understood the dynamics of the marketplace.

They knew how to cope in that situation. This man, he refers to here, made some immediate calculations.

He says he knew that he couldn't dig. He wasn't strong enough to do that. He knew that he was too proud to beg. And he knew that the money he had control of was going to last for less than 24 hours.

[10 : 00] And therefore, he had to take his present situation, compromising as it was, and he had to cleverly and resolutely act.

Because he had a situation imposed on him which was entirely hopeless. And he was forced to act urgently.

He didn't call for a meeting. He started to act. That's maybe a blasphemous meaning word in his health. But that's, in a sense, the spirit of this parable.

He acted. He knew that he had only hours to pull this situation out of the fire. And he knew that he had to act decisively because there was no tomorrow for him.

And he knew that he had certain advantages in terms of power and influence and the money which his master had entrusted to him. And he knew he had control of that for just a few hours.

[11 : 08] And at the end of that time, he would be destitute. And so he acted. He acted resolutely and courageously. Well, you see, the reason that I think Jesus so admired this man is because he understood his situation.

He knew the dynamics of his situation very clearly. And with only a few hours left to him, he acted so decisively and so resolutely with such determination that by the end of that few hours, he was home free.

He made all the friends he had ever needed. And his world understood that. And our world understands a lot of things.

As long as you can get away with it, you get caught too bad. As long as you can get away with it, that's fine. What Jesus is saying is here are the children of life.

And to them has been preached the gospel. And to them the kingdom of God has come. And to them Christ has promised to return.

[12 : 42] And if that isn't a sufficiently critical situation to force them to act decisively and resolutely and determinately, then what else do they need?

And why don't they do something in the light of what's happened? They know that their time is done. They know that their opportunity is limited. They know that their resources they have, humanly speaking, are only going to last for minutes.

Then why don't they act on that? Why do they sit back and sing hymns? I don't want to be terribly irreligious, but I do want to make the point.

I used to go to a Christian camp. And at the Christian camp was a recently converted naval lieutenant commander who had just retired.

And he surveyed with his experience, die, this camp setting. And saw the people gather around the piano to sing the old hymns of the faith.

[13 : 55] Well, nobody was helping wash the dishes. He referred to them as hymns in the baths.

They didn't realize the situation that they were in. They were not able to recognize the urgency of the situation.

And this is exactly what Jesus is calling on us to do. To make a fearless inventory of what has happened since we have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Since we have experienced the reality of the kingdom. Since we have encountered the person of the Holy Spirit. And since we live under the judgment of God. And since we know that Christ is coming again.

Why don't we act very resolutely? It was said of that person. He said that he acted.

[15 : 09] He responded cleverly with resolute action imposed by the hopelessness of his situation. And the resultant urgency.

Jesus says that's what we should be as Christians. We've got to get over being sort of piously content with what we have.

Piously going on with what we're doing. Piously pretending that it's only a matter of time until we are received into the very courts of heaven.

Jesus said don't you see the importance of the moment. Don't you see that everything you've been given is of very little value to you.

It's very short term prosperity that you're enjoying. And there. There awaits you a kingdom which belongs to you.

[16 : 10] Why don't you act in the same way? Jesus complained about this. The children of life. They didn't understand the reality of their situation.

They don't know how to deal with money. With friends. With possessions. With prestige. They don't know how to take all that belongs to them. They say well I just want to keep my hands clean of that.

Jesus says you can't keep your hands clean of that. You've got money. You've got jobs. You've got responsibilities. You've got houses. You've got friends. You've got membership. You've got influence.

You've got a whole lot of things. That belong to you right now. And aren't going to belong to you for very long. So start using them. In terms of the kingdom of God. Because that's the thing that has value.

It's as though in a way. You were told alright. As you go out of church. You are going to be given an envelope. And in that envelope is a million dollars. And you've got to come back here on Christmas morning destitute.

[17 : 21] That's about what the parable teaches. To recognize that short term high level responsibility that you have.

Well that's the parable. And it's a very powerful one that I think we all need to take seriously.

One of the great delights for me. And with this I conclude. One of the great delights for me of having come to this parish and this congregation. Is I have watched a lot of people act in the business world.

From well over in the sidelines. And with my dog collar firmly in place. And my hands piously together. I watch. And see what happens. And I see what happens.

When the stock market crashes around their ears. And in two days. They've got it all resolved. And they're whistling on the golf course.

[18 : 24] You know. How they did it I have no idea. And they're glad they did it. But they don't want to tell me exactly how. How I've figured. That a man gets a notice that his job is over.

His income is finished. His way of life has come to an end. Within a week he's doing something else. Which is more satisfying and more significant to him.

And I see these people. And I see these people all around me all the time. And I see them sitting in the congregation. And I know some of the things they've been through.

And I share. This isn't too pretentious of me. I share. What I take to be.

The jealousy that Jesus Christ built. For that man. Who could act so decisively. In that situation. Jesus was jealous.

[19 : 29] That the children of light. Should be able to act in the same way. With regard to the kingdom. With regard to the things of ultimate better.

That they would be able. To realize their situation. To recognize their assets.

To see the transitory nature. Of all that belonged to them. In the light of what was coming. And to be able to use it. Effectively.

And decisively. For the kingdom. Those were the people. Jesus. The thing he expresses.

His. His year. He points them up. The children of light. This is now. As the children of light.

[20 : 27] Could operate. In your sleep. As those people. Operate in their sleep. Then. I would know. That you understood.

The kingdom. Friend. We as a congregation. As individuals. Can. Understand.

The kingdom. And the urgency. And the decisiveness. Of the things. That we must do. In order to be. The children of light.

In order to be wise. And prove. The exercise. And all that we can. In terms of the purposes. Of the kingdom.

Listen. To be with you.

[21 : 32] We say, we believe in one God, Father, O Lord, and we believe in one God, and we believe in one God, and we believe in one God, Jesus Christ, and the Son of God, and the Son of God, and we believe in one God, and we believe in one God, and we believe in one God, and we believe in one God, ourén, and the Son, and the Son, and the Son.

For our safety first died on the cross of God. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again and he hordes with the scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again, Lord, and judge all that he brings again. His kingdom of heaven are with you.

The name of the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and the name of the Lord. The Lord, and the name of the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and the name of the Holy Spirit.

If you would at least turn to page 112. At the top of the page it says, Let us pray with confidence to the Lord, saying, Lord, hear our prayer.

[23 : 42] Let us pray. O Lord, guard and direct your church in the way of unity, service, and praise.

Lord, hear our prayer. Give to all nations an awareness of the unity of the human family. Lord, hear our prayer.

Cleanse our hearts of prejudice and selfishness, and inspire us to hunger and thirst for what is right. Lord, hear our prayer.

Teach us to use your creation for your greater praise, that all may share the good things you provide. Lord, hear our prayer.

Strengthen all who give their energy or skill for the healing of those who are sick in the body or in mind. Lord, hear our prayer. Set free all who are bound by fear and despair.

[24 : 58] Lord, hear our prayer. Grant a peaceful end and eternal rest to all who are dying. And your comfort to those who mourn.

Lord, hear our prayer. Pray for the ministry of the church and its mission.

Turn to page 676. Amen. Second prayer on the page.

It's about all of us. What Mary has just said in our mission to the church. So together, let us pray. Draw your church together, O Lord, into one great company of disciples.

Together, following our Lord Jesus Christ in every walk of life. Together, serving Him in His mission to the world. Together, witnessing His love on every continent and diamond.

[26 : 17] We ask this in His name and for His sake. Amen. As this week we head into a provincial election, if you turn the page to 678.

Here's a prayer for responsible citizenship or for a college. So together, Lord, keep this nation under your care.

Bless the leaders of our land that we may be a people at peace among ourselves and a blessing to other nations of the earth. Help us elect trustworthy leaders, contribute to wise decisions for the general of them, and thus serve you faithfully in our generation in the honor of your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen. If you return to page 697.

Amen. There's much that we have to be thankful for.

[27 : 53] Prayer number six is a general thanksgiving for all the riches that we have that we can use. Whatever ways to bring the kingdom of God to the kingdom of man.

So together, our Lord God, we thank you for all your blessings, for life and health, for laughter and fun, for all our power of mind and body, for our homes and beloved dear ones, for everything that is beautiful, good and true.

But above all, we thank you for giving your Son to be our Savior and friend, that we may always find your true happiness in pleasing you and helping others.

To know and love you, for Jesus Christ's sake. Now, if you would turn back to page 191.

We have an opportunity before we come forward to the Lord's table. Be honest with the Lord. Share with him our failings, our sin.

[29 : 24] Receive back from him the priceless gift of forgiveness. Dear friends in Christ, God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy.

He welcomes sinners and invites them to his table. Let us confess our sins, confident in God's forgiveness.

Most merciful God, we confess that you have sinned against you. God, word, and deed. We have not loved you with our own heart.

We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us.

That we may delight in your will. Walk through our knees. Glory to you. Almighty God, have mercy upon you.

[30 : 33] Pardon and deliver you from all your sins. Confirm and strengthen you in all goodness. And keep you in eternal life.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Lord, please stand. As we take this opportunity to express our oneness in Christ.

The peace of the Lord be always with you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Now together we sing our offertory hymn. It's number 132. Thank you.

Thank you.