

Investing in Friends

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[0:00] Well, good morning, everyone. I'd be grateful if you could keep your Bibles open at that point. and also on the St. Paul's app, a good bit of an outline as we kick off our mission month for this year.

What we do in life echoes in eternity. The movie, it was one of the more quotable quotes. You can actually get it on a T-shirt as well now with Russell Crowe's face on it, the old face, not the new one. From his character Maximus Decimus Meridius, the movie Gladiator. The point of the statement is that every choice and action that we make now leaves a mark that goes beyond our brief time here on Earth.

Now, he said it in the movie to motivate his troops just before a battle, calling them basically to accept the death that was inevitable and to focus, therefore, if you're able to accept that your death is inevitable, it means that you will live now and that you will focus on living now and focus on, in fact, fighting now and dying with a purpose.

What we do in life echoes in eternity. It's a statement that Christians ought to be more confident of than anyone else.

[1:36] As we saw last term, if you were here with us, we focused the term on the idea of Christians are in Christ.

It's the doctrine of union with Christ. That is, the summary of it all is that everything that is his is ours. By virtue of being in Christ, everything that he achieves becomes true for the Christian. And so his death, his resurrection, his life, his ascension, his reign are ours. We are in him and he is in us now.

And the Christian, by virtue of being in Christ, is rich in every way and it's entirely a gift from him for us.

In the coming weeks, what we're doing now is, because we were spending a bit of time focusing on that doctrine, what we were wanting to do now is focus on, what does it look like to live that out practically now?

[2:39] What does it look like to live out the Christian life of being in Christ? And so today we pick up a parable that Jesus told his first followers on his way to Jerusalem, Jerusalem to die on a cross for our salvation.

And on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus really told his first followers, what does it mean to follow him? What does it mean to be in him? What impact does that have on your life? How does it shape your world? And one of the big things he addressed on multiple occasions is the perspective of money, possessions and wealth and how we handle them.

And in fact, particularly in Luke's Gospel, but you certainly see this in the New Testament, that how we handle our money, our possessions and our wealth, it lies at the heart of the Christian life.

It's not a subset thing over there. It lies at the heart of the Christian life. That's not an overstatement. I'm not using hyperbole because we are short on our budget.

[3:52] The Bible emphatically demonstrates that what we do with those things, our money, our wealth and our possessions, will influence eternity.

In fact, it was right here at the end of that passage that Anne just read out to us in verse 13. It's so important that we grapple hold of this because what Jesus does there is he sets up money as the alternative God, our alternative source of salvation, security, life, significance.

And so God has recorded in the Bible everything we need to know about his investment priorities, his high standards of management and the rewards he offers his faithful stewards.

So three points today. If you've got the St. Paul's app, this is where we're heading in this parable. Now, this parable, the shrewd manager, it's a simple parable.

It's distracting and it's also quite challenging. So let's go through it real quick. There is a manager who's been doing a poor job at managing his owner's estate and his investment portfolio.

[5 : 31] And so he gets his termination notice. And at this point, he's in a whole heap of trouble. When word gets around that he's been doing a really bad job at managing, he's not likely to get a similar vocation somewhere else.

Those doors are going to close for him. And he's been sitting in his office too long to start digging trenches for a living and he's not going to lower himself to begging. And this is a day and an age and a culture where there's no social services.

There's no government pension kicks in at this point. There's no superannuation to draw down on. And so how is he going to live? It's a life and death decision for him. How am I going to live?

What am I going to do? And so he makes a decision in that moment that will pay benefits for him into the future. That's really the crux of it.

That's the key idea of the story. Investing now, making a decision now that pays future dividends. And that's it.

[6 : 36] That's the key idea there in verses 5 to 7. This is what he does. So he calls in each of his master's debtors. He asked the first, how much do you owe my master? 900 gallons of olive oil, he replied.

The manager told him, take your bill, sit down quickly and make it 450. Then he asked the second, how much do you owe? A thousand bushels of wheat, he replied. He told him, take your bill, make it 800.

That's the action he made right there. So it's pretty simple in terms of understanding what happens. Verse 8, however, is the distracting bit.

The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. I mean, why on earth is he being commended here?

Why is he being commended for what appears to be completely dishonest behaviour? So it seems like, you know, extrapolate. Jesus might be saying it's okay to cheat with your finances, providing it works out okay for you in the long run.

[7 : 45] That's not what he's saying here. One of the best theories, there's multiple theories about what's actually being said here. One of the best theories is that this manager was adding his own fees on top of the interest of the investment of the manager.

So he's managing his master's investment portfolio. He lends out 1,000 bushels of wheat to somebody. And on top of that, he's attaching his own fees to that.

And this could be the reason why he's called dishonest at the beginning. The master was getting interest on his investment, but so was the manager as well.

And so in this moment, this is what the commentator is saying, is that in this moment, when he sits down with the master's debtors, he's taking his fees off.

His fees off. And in that moment, the debtors are going, brilliant.

[8 : 59] I owe so much less now. Your master is a great guy for doing that, unbeknownst to them that it wasn't the master's fees on top of it anyway.

And so he not only wins the favor of his master's debtors, but he also gives his master a great name around town as well, such a generous guy.

What the master commends him for here is his shrewdness, not his dishonesty, not his removing of the fees, but his shrewdness.

In other words, in that moment, when all was lost, you made a really, really smart decision there.

That was very clever, what you did right there. And then this is the challenging bit in verse 8.

[10 : 01] For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind. That is, the generation of those who are outside of Christ than are people of the light.

Jesus is saying that this dishonest manager is wiser in the use of his master's resources than the followers of Jesus are in the use of God's resources.

That's the challenge right there. Now, the word manager here is the same word, it can be translated steward.

This man is managing someone else's resources. He is a steward of someone else's resources. In a similar way, you might say a fund manager can't do anything they want with someone else's money.

You know, you don't get a fund manager, give him your resources, say, do whatever you want with it. And the Bible makes it very clear that when it comes to the resources that we have, it all comes as a gift from God, but they are still all his.

[11:30] Everything we have is still his. And we are stewards of what he has given us. The broad context for the Christian is that God made everything, he's the God who sustains everything, he's the God who owns everything.

Everything that we have in life, including life itself and the skills and the opportunities we have, are all a gift to us. And without those gifts, we would not make any money at all.

I mean, it's quite difficult, in fact, to make money to turn up to work on Monday if you're dead. Very difficult. And everything that we have, including the skill sets we have, are gifts from him.

Including the opportunities that we have, are gifts from him. And you go, hang on a bit, Steve. I've worked very hard for everything that I have.

Do you think the person sitting in poverty in India does not work hard? Do you think they don't work hard?

[12:47] If you were born on a hillside in Switzerland in the year 1000, you would not have the opportunities that you have right now.

Everything we have is a gift. It's a gift to be healthy. It's a gift to be able to work. Being born in a time and a place like this that we do, with all its opportunities and resources, is a gift.

We work with the life. We work with the circumstances. We work with the talents that God has given us. We are stewards of his resources.

1 Chronicles 9 is a prayer of the fabulously wealthy and powerful King David. And he puts it really succinctly, I think. Everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Wealth and honour come from you. You are the ruler of all things. Who am I? And who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this?

[14:02] Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. All this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your holy name comes from your hand and all of it belongs to you.

God's expectations are that we steward his resources with an attitude of radical generosity because that's who God is.

And if we are not being radically generous, the Bible calls it fraud. The Bible calls it dishonesty.

The Bible, in fact, calls it robbery. We're robbing God. That is, to not give generously, to not live a life of pervasive generosity, not just with money but with all the resources God has given us, is not just a lack of compassion.

It's actually a lack of integrity. It's a lack of integrity. That's why Luke 16 here, verses 10 to 12, refer to dishonesty and trustworthiness with what God has given us.

[15:31] Malachi 3.8, Will a mere mortal rob God? And yet you rob me. But you ask, well, how are we rob you? In tithes and offerings.

The people in the Old Testament were told that as the absolute bare minimum, 10% of their income need to be given away as a starting point. The New Testament standards are not any lower.

There's no correction to that at all in the New Testament. Nothing at all. And I would even argue that these standards are higher, especially when we have a greater hope, a greater knowledge, a greater grace, a greater benefit of being in Christ.

So let's just have a think for a moment. You know, we watch the news, we hear about the economy, and we are fearful.

We think that 10%, my goodness, that's an awful lot of money. And maybe it's quite possible that we need to think about it in an entirely different way.

[16:39] Imagine someone employs you as their investment manager. Let's say Gina Reinhart says, I want you to be my investment manager.

And if you don't know who that is, the richest person in Australia. I don't know, more than \$40 billion or something. I don't know what it is. And I want you to be my investment manager.

And here's your terms of employment as my investment manager. You're my steward of my resource. You get to keep 90% of the returns. And I'll take 10%.

You're going to knock back those terms? Anyone going to knock back those terms? That's how generous God is.

That is how exceedingly generous he is. But if we love money more than we love God, then those terms won't be enough for us.

[17 : 50] When we love money more than we love God, then those terms will not be enough. And so the point here is that we are stewards of money that is not ours.

But verse 9 is the goal Jesus has in mind as we steward his resources. And frankly, this bit is quite amazing.

The goal that God has in us stewarding his resources, according to biblical terms, the goal he has is our, yours, the giver, your happiness, your love, your security.

That's his goal with it. It's not just funding budgets and closing gaps and paying for bills.

It is your joy. Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourself so that when it is gone, you'll be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

[18 : 51] So this shrewd manager here puts aside short-term financial gain for the sake of gaining something that was long-term more valuable for him.

And that is what a wise investment is, is it not? It's where you put your resources into something that will increase in value.

It's why I buy certain cars rather than other cars. Because I don't want to drive out of the lot and there it goes, 50% is gone.

Just like that. And Jesus gives us a very helpful perspective here when he says in verse 9, so that when it is gone, his point is that there is not a single investment that you make in this world.

Even if you're putting all your money to AI right now, there's not a single investment that will in fact last. There's not a single material thing, there's not an asset, there's not a place where you can put your money that will really, really, really actually go on just increasing in value.

[20 : 19] It will be gone. You can't take it with you, as they say. And Jesus is saying that the shrewd stewarding of God's resources is investing in something that will literally last forever and continue to increase in value.

Forever. What I love about the way Jesus puts it here is he doesn't leave it on the abstract level for us. You see, I'm logically, personally logically convinced by the argument for long-term investment that grows in value over the long haul.

Logically convinced about that. However, it's what Jesus says here, the next thing he says, that in fact moves my heart and fuels my action.

But especially it moves the heart. You see how Jesus describes eternal dwellings? In verse 9, he describes it as friends.

That's what we're investing in. Friends. Use the money that God has given you, all the resources God has given you, to gain friends who will welcome you into your eternal home.

[21 : 48] Now, don't be confused here. Jesus is not saying use your money to buy friends so that God will then welcome you into his eternal home. That's not what he's saying.

He's saying use your resources now to gain friends, eternal friends, who will welcome you into your, they will welcome you into your eternal home and you will welcome them.

One commentator summed up the main point of this parable like this. Although these things, your property, your ability, your time, belong to this life only, Jesus says, yet what will happen to you then when you pass into that life will depend on what you were doing with them here and now.

Make sure you use, your use of them brings you into a fellowship of friends which will survive beyond death. Turns out, money can buy you happiness.

It can buy you joy forever. You see, we tend in this world to look to money to give us security and significance but genuine security and significance is in fact relational, not material.

[23 : 15] It's relational, not material. We were created for relationship and every single one of us needs love more than anything else.

And in fact, when we feel truly wealthy, it's in those moments when we are loving people and people are loving us back, when we're surrounded by relationships of love.

That's when we feel like we're truly alive. That's when we feel like we're, you know, all the money in the world can't buy this. But the pain of this world is that that kind of love, we may have momentary experiences of it but it's always out of reach.

We don't want it to ever end but it's always out of reach. Love now for us in this world is always a source of pain. Even in the moments of joy, a source of pain, there are barriers, right now, to loving and being loved in this world.

One barrier that we face is that we're often not loved for our own sake. It's painful when we discover that people are not loving us for our own sake but in fact, just using us to get something that they really want.

[24 : 46] and it's very rare for any of us to love another person totally, entirely for their own sake. Most love in order to get something.

Another barrier is the inability to express love without hindrance. Things like pride and selfishness and defensiveness and pettiness and coldness means we can't do it.

We can't even get close to expressing our love fully without some form of hindrance. But in heaven, we will love without impediment.

All sin and pride and selfishness and pettiness and defensiveness will all be gone. We also struggle in this world with a mutual love. Is there anything more painful than to love someone more than they love you back?

It's very rare for love to be mutual at the same time. In this life, many people we love, we love them more than they love us back in that moment and that means it's painful.

[26 : 03] And there's also the barrier of the unhappiness of those we love. We can never be happier than the people that we love. What happens to them happens to us because our heart is bound to them.

If you love more than five people in this world, you will always be unhappy. But the greatest barrier to love would have to be separation of that love.

We want a love where we will never be separated from the people that we love. It's painful knowing that when you marry someone, it's highly likely that one of you is going to bury the other one.

And that's the way our relationships are in this world. That's the way they are. But not there. Not in Christ, in his presence for all of eternity.

We are made to desire the kind of relationships and friendships and love that is in the kingdom of God, in the presence of Christ, in heaven. And that means that in Christ the best is yet to come.

[27 : 17] And heaven, whatever images that are floating out there around at the moment in our broader society, heaven fundamentally is a place of friendship, of mutual love relationship, a place of deep relationship, a place of eternal love, a place where we love and are loved without barriers at all forever.

Forever. the love we experience in this world, the fleeting moments of it is absolutely thrilling because it's a foretaste of what will be ours every moment for eternity in Christ.

The barriers to loving and being loved that we currently experience won't exist in heaven. So imagine what it would be like to be completely sure of that future which was one of the points of our whole term last term of looking at in Christ is that because he has done it we ought to be sure that that is our future.

Imagine that to believe in Jesus is to be able to live with God and friends in perfect love forever. love with no barriers forever. How would that shape your life now?

Would you not use your worldly wealth now knowing what really lasts is love? People, relationships, friendships and we have it all to look forward to.

[29 : 13] If you knew that shares in Apple Company tomorrow or Tuesday, let's say Tuesday, were going to skyrocket by 10 times their current value on Tuesday, what would you do tomorrow?

Take out a loan? If you could guarantee that, would you take out a loan and throw everything you possibly could and then sell them all on Wednesday?

Would you not? What this parable is calling us to do is don't put money before people, use God's money to create a fellowship of eternal friends.

When people find hope and love and faith in Jesus, they will be your friends forever. They will love you forever without any barrier.

Now, the motivation in the end for us, for all this life of radical generosity, is that we have the Christian in Christ is a recipient of the ultimate investment of God, if you like.

[30 : 38] We have received the ultimate love and friendship of the true steward of God's resources. 2 Corinthians 8, the apostle Paul is encouraging the church in Corinth to give generously to a great need in the same way that other churches had done previously.

And quite interesting there is that he doesn't order them to. He says, I could, but he doesn't order them to do that. He doesn't command them to do it.

He shows them how to do it. He shows them how to, the motivation in order to be pervasively generous. And what he does is he shows them love.

He says, I want you to overflow in radical generosity in your giving, and the way to do it is to look to Jesus, your ultimate friend, the true steward.

Think about Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

[31 : 52] You see, Jesus is the ultimate friend, the one friend, who completely emptied himself of everything to turn us, his enemies, into his friends, so that he will welcome us with open arms into his presence for all of eternity.

And so in that sense he is the true steward, and as recipients of that ultimate friendship, we get to live with him forever in perfect love, abundantly rich, joint heirs with him of all that is his.

And so what Paul does in 2 Corinthians, he says, steward God's resources, in a way that's controlled by that knowledge, by that hope, by that future, by that love, by that friendship.

And so I want to call us today at St. Paul's, help us to see that where we are right now, where you are, I am individually right now, is that we're in exactly the same position as this shrewd manager when he got his termination notice.

He still had keys to the office. He still had access to the boss's investment portfolio, and he had a chance to act in view of the future.

[33 : 36] And so here's your chance to act in view of the future. Here's the opportunity that's right before us right now.

And why I think it's so crucial for us to be seeing this and seeing the challenge of this text is that you can see our trajectory in our own budget here at St.

Paul's, is that we're 10,000 behind what we were this time last year in our general giving. And as I've said before, the government doesn't fund us, the wider church doesn't fund us, we pay our own bills.

And on top of that, in this mission month, we are \$50,000 short of our target in supporting our global mission partners.

And so between now and the end of the year, we want to see both of those gaps closed, that might seem massive. But this time last year, in one month, we raised just over \$40,000 to close that gap.

[34 : 56] And so friends, I hand it to you. Make your eternal joy complete and invest in eternal friends for their eternal joy.

Let's pray. Gracious God, we thank you that all scripture has been ordained by you, not just to know you, but also for our lives in this world to be shaped by you.

when Jesus was confronted with the rich young ruler who wanted to know what it was to be saved, how to be saved, Jesus, you said that it's impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, but all things are possible for you.

and we are mindful that as we sit in this church in Chatswood, in one of the wealthiest times of the history of humanity, in one of the wealthiest cities in the world, and one of the wealthiest places in the wealthiest city in the world, that those words, that it's impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, is us.

And it's everyone who would walk in our doors. And yet, Jesus, you had mercy on us. There's nothing that we have done or can do, can earn salvation, and we just want to thank you, Jesus, for your abundant generosity, your radical generosity to us.

[36 : 51] that you did the impossible and made us yours, your friends. Thank you for giving everything for us. And so we'd ask that you would so fill our hearts with your love and your friendship, that we would overflow with radical generosity with all that you've given us.

and we ask that you might be glorified and that we might be welcomed by friends in eternal dwelling with you. Amen.