

Vision Series 2017

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: 02 December 2017

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Good evening, everyone. It's great to be in church with you tonight. If you haven't met before, my name's Steve, a senior pastor here. And one of the highlights for me in our church year is Vision Sunday. And the whole Vision series, in fact, this is my ninth one I've led us through as a church. And for me, it just gets better and better. So we're almost at the end of this one, but this is a crucial one for us tonight on our Vision Sunday. And I want to begin our time together reflecting on the life of one of the greatest philosophical thinkers, one of the sharpest political minds, most gifted artists, and I suspect most quoted individuals of the past 100 years. Arnold Schwarzenegger was born the son of a low-ranking Austrian police officer and was destined for a life of just total obscurity until his hands wrapped around a barbell for the very first time at the age of 14. By 18, he was living in London and traveling the world competing in bodybuilding championships. And at one point, his coach, a guy named Wag Bennett, asked him, Arnie, what is it that you want to do with your life?

And Wag said that the response of this 18-year-old was remarkable. He said, I want to be the richest and the greatest bodybuilder of all time. I want to live in the United States.

I want to be an actor, a movie director, own an apartment block, and dabble in politics. As an 18-year-old, he saw the future, what he wanted, he just went for it. And Wag, as well as those who trained with Arnie and competed with Arnie, said that they had never met anyone who was so focused on what they want to achieve in the future. His training partner said that if you ever beat him at anything, he would look at you and say, you will never, ever do that again.

And he said, doesn't matter how hard you're trying to man, what sort of training you put in, you could never beat Arnie at it again. He was so, so focused. And Jesus, in that passage that was just read out to us, tells a story, a similar story about a man who saw the future, saw what he needed to do. He just went for it. Just went for it.

Have a look at it. You've got your service sheets there in front of you. Luke 16, verses 1 to 15. Look at verse 1. Jesus told his disciples there was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. And so he called him in and asked him, what is this that I hear about you?

[2 : 42] Give an account of your management because you cannot be manager any longer. And the manager said to himself, well, what am I going to do now? My master has taken away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig and I'm ashamed to beg. I know what I'll do so that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses. Now in Jesus' time, this manager person here was like a chief operating officer and a chief financial officer rolled into the one. That is, they ran the entire estate of the wealthy owner. And what they also did was that they would get the owner's money and invest the owner's money as well. So they had a very, very high responsibility.

And this manager, as it says, has been a bit dishonest and he hasn't been doing such a great job. And so he gets a termination notice. You're fired is his notice. And he knows now that he's in trouble. You see, when word gets around, he's not likely to get another manager's job. He's not likely to be in this kind of position again. And he's been sitting in an office for too long. His hands are beautiful. And he's thinking, I can't dig trenches for a living. I haven't got a strong enough back for that sort of stuff. And I'm not going to lie on myself. I can't go from this role down to begging. And what's more, there's no social services. There's no Centrelink to fall back on. And so for this man, this is a life and death decision. How's he going to live? How am I going to feed myself? Where's my food coming from? I'm going to get my housing. And so what he does is he makes a decision now that will pay benefits for the future. And that is the point of this whole parable. That's what it's all about.

And what he does next though, is the bit of the parable that can be a little distracting. Verse five. Notice what the outcome is from his decision.

It creates friendships that didn't exist before. In acting for the future, he won the favor and obligation of his master's debtors.

[5 : 25] And the really strange thing here is the master's response in verse eight says, the master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. It's an incredible response.

Why would the owner commend the manager for his action here? I mean, it appears that he's ripped him off. But one of the best theories is that the manager here was doing what the tax collectors used to do in first century Palestine. And they would get the cut that the Romans required, and then they would add their percentage on top. And it's most likely that that's what this manager is doing here is part of his investment portfolio. He's investing his bosses.

He's the owner of the estate's investments. And he's adding his percentage on top of it as well. He's getting his interest out of the investment.

And so what he's doing here would appear that he's taking his investments off. He's removing his fees. And it makes his master's debtors happy.

They're paying a much smaller bill. But he's also giving his master a great name in town at exactly the same time. So it's like he's getting nothing out of this deal now.

[6 : 46] Now, whether that's exactly how it worked is really, it doesn't matter. It's not the point of the parable. But Jesus' point here is that this man is using his opportunity, his wealth, with an eye on the future.

And the master commends him because he acted shrewdly. You made a great decision there. A wise decision, a smart judgment. You're astute. But see the rebuke of the second half of verse 8. This shrewd, wise, astute action is one that Christians fail in. It says, For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are people of the light.

Jesus is saying that this manager's actions, he's wiser. He's wiser in the youths of his wealth than his disciples are in theirs.

So what we're going to do is we're going to take a moment here to learn a couple of lessons from this parable about what it might look like to be wise. The first thing we learn here is that Jesus likens us, his disciples, to a manager of someone else's estate.

[8 : 07] Someone else's money. The word manager here can also be easily translated as steward. So this man is a steward. He's a manager of someone else's money.

He's a fund manager. When you manage someone else's money, you can't do whatever you want with that money because it isn't your money.

You have to do it according to the terms of the person who owns the money. And so first up, Jesus is reminding his disciples that if you understand anything, if you understand that there is a God, then you'll know that whatever you have is in fact not yours.

We are stewards of God's money, of his resources. And so the first thing is we've got to stop acting as if it's ours. That's pretty hard hitting.

Because particularly in the Western world, we have a strong attachment to wealth and possessions because we've worked for it. We love the idea of the so-called self-made man.

[9 : 12] It's my money. I've worked hard for this. I've sacrificed for this. And Jesus says, no, it's not. It's not your money. If you're a Christian, there is a much bigger, broader theological context that you put this truth into.

As Christians, we believe that God made everything, that he sustains everything. We have life and we have skills and we have opportunities that he has gifted each one of us with.

They are gifts from him to us. And without those things, we would not make any money at all.

Without the life that he gives us every day, and the Bible says he puts the breath in our lungs moment by moment, with that breath that he gives us, he gives us the ability to make money.

And if he chooses not to give that to us, we have no ability to make money. Without life, it's extremely difficult to do anything. If you're healthy and you're able to work, that's a gift.

[10 : 23] The fact that you were born in this time and this place with its many opportunities, that's a gift. If you were born in the 12th century on a mountaintop in Tibet, you would think very differently about the resources that you have.

And so we work hard for what we have with the life, the circumstances, the talents that God has given us. We are stewards of every gift from him.

Listen to the prayer of the fabulously wealthy and powerful King David from 1 Chronicles 29.

Everything in heaven and earth is yours. Wealth and honor 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? 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.

[11 : 39] So if we're stewards, it's not ours, and God calls us to be radically generous. And if we're not radically generous with the gifts that he's given us, that includes time, emotions, and everything else, then it's not called stinginess.

It's called robbery. It's not a lack of compassion for the poor and the needy, and it's actually a lack of integrity in our hearts.

Malachi 3.8 is pretty clear in this. It says, That is, the people in the Old Testament were told that 10% of their income needed to be given away as the starting point.

That was the starting point. And I'm not convinced that the standards of the people in the New Testament are any lower, especially when we have a greater hope, a greater revelation, a greater grace, and greater benefits.

However, if we do think that 10% as a starting point is a lot of money, then maybe we're thinking about it totally the wrong way. We've got this whole thing upside down.

[12 : 53] Don't forget we're stewards of someone else's money. So imagine someone comes to you. They're a billionaire. They come to you, and they say to you, Please manage my wealth for me, and here's the terms.

The terms are this. Every year, you get to keep 90% of the returns from the investment, and you've got to give me 10% of the returns from the investment.

Would you want that job? Come on. Would you want that job? Who wouldn't want that job? Every fund manager would kill someone else to get that job.

In all seriousness. And that is exactly how generous God is. That is what God is offering us. But if we love money more than we love God, then those terms, even those terms, will not be good enough for us.

We won't be generous. We won't give. And it's not called stinginess. It's called robbery. We are stewards of money that is not ours. That's the first thing we learn from this parable.

[14 : 03] But there is something even more incredible that is being taught here. Verse 9 is the goal that Jesus has in mind with our stewardship of his resources. And the goal is our happiness, our love, our security forever.

I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourself so that when it is gone, you'll be welcomed into eternal dwellings. So what this manager does here is he puts aside some short-term financial gain for the sake of gaining something that is long-term and infinitely more valuable.

And that's what a wise investment is. A wise investment is where you put your money into something that is going to increase in value over time. So what can you put your money into that will really last?

Not this world. Because Jesus gives a really helpful perspective in verse 9. He says, so that when it is gone, what Jesus is saying there is, there is no investment that is in this world that will last.

Not one. There's no material thing. There's no asset. There's no place where you can put your money that will really, really last. And he's calling his disciples here to make a wise investment to put their money into something that will literally last forever.

[15 : 39] Put your money, he says, into building the kingdom of God. Use your money in such a way that there is glory in heaven. Put your money into something that will last forever. Now, what I love about the way that Jesus puts it here is that he doesn't just stay at that abstract level.

Because I'm the sort of person who's logically convinced for the argument for long-term investment. You know, immediate pain for long-term gain. I'm totally, totally in for that, logically.

But what Jesus says next is what moves my heart and causes me to open my wallet. This is what moves my heart.

And I hope it does for you too. Look at how Jesus describes eternal dwellings in verse 9. This is how he describes heaven.

Friends. Use your money now to gain friends who will welcome you into eternal dwellings.

[16 : 46] In other words, to get eternal friends. Let me quote one commentator who wrote on this verse, and it's the main point of this whole parable. He wrote, although these things, your property,

your ability, your time, belong to this life only.

Jesus says, yet what will happen to you when, then, when you pass into that life will depend on what you are doing with them here and now.

Make sure that your use of them brings you into a fellowship of friends which will survive beyond death. That is definitely what Jesus is saying here.

We look to money to give us security, significance. As I said last week, it's the identity scorecard for us and the possessions that we have. But genuine security and significance is not material.

It's actually relational. In the end, the most important thing that everyone needs is love. We feel truly wealthy when we are loving people and are surrounded by people loving us back.

[18:02] You can get someone who is an absolute pauper and yet they feel so rich, feel so rich when they are surrounded by people who love them and who they love.

That's because wealth is relational, not material. That's when you feel really alive and yet the love that we really need is out of reach for us in this life.

We get a taste of it now. We get a foretaste of it but the best is yet to come. The thinking that heaven is a place of harps and halos and crowns and gold streets doesn't kind of move me in the same kind of way as heaven being a world of friendships and relationships and perfect love.

That moves me. A place of deep relationships. A place of real love. A place where we love and are loved without any barriers at all.

That is a place to really hope for and invest in now because the love that we experience in this world, the friendships, the relationships we experience in this world are a foretaste of what is to come but they fall so far short of what will be in heaven.

[19:36] love in this world both the receiving of it and the expressing of it is often a source of pain.

There are barriers to loving and being loved in this world that will not exist in heaven and that's what makes heaven such an incredible prospect. that's why if you can make investments now to increase your experience of that that's a wise investment.

See one of the barriers we face now that won't be there is that we are often as individuals not loved for our own sake. It's painful when we discover that people are not loving us for our own sake but actually using us to get something else.

it's very rare for any of us to love another person totally for their own sake. Most love is a love in order to receive love and in heaven we will be loved absolutely completely fully for who we are.

Another barrier for loving this world which is just a foretaste of what we become is the inability for us to express our love for others without any hindrance whatsoever.

[21:02] Things like pride selfishness defensiveness pettiness coldness means that we cannot fully completely express our love for another person even those who are the closest to us in this world.

Even for me I mean I said this morning for me for Natalie I get to the end of each day and I realise how much I've failed to express the love that I've got deep down there somewhere it's like there's this ocean of love it's got it coming up through a straw you know like it's just just not coming out the way it's meant to.

So much failure we can't even get close to expressing our love fully without some kind of hindrance but in heaven there'll be love without any impediment all sin pride selfishness pettiness coldness defensiveness it's going to be all gone.

We also struggle in this world to have a mutual love is there anything more painful than to love someone more than they love you back? It's very rare to have a mutual love at the same time.

In this place this world many of the people that we love we love more than they love us back and that is nothing but pain but heaven everyone will love everyone mutually and fully.

[22:29] There's also the barrier of another barrier of love in this world and that's the unhappiness of those we love. Think about this for a minute. This is for everyone here because you've all been kids and still are.

Once you start having children once you start if you're a couple and you start having children for the rest of your life your happiness level never increases more than the unhappiness of one of your children or of your unhappiest child.

Once you start having children your happiness level never increases more than your unhappiest child. Your unhappiest child. See what you've done to your parents?

You know we can never be happier we can never be happier than the people we love because their heart becomes our heart and if you love more than five people any one time in this world you're always going to be unhappy.

That's just a fact. C.S. Lewis said that if you don't want your heart to be broken then just stop loving people. Love is such a source of pain but of course if that's what you're going to do then you become a hard person and you're right on your way to hell.

[23 : 51] Love is such a source of pain but in heaven everyone will be perfectly happy filled with a never ceasing joy. But the greatest barrier to love in this world is the separation of love.

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

Highly likely unless of course you both go down the plane crash or something like that. In my case I've got five people sitting around my dining room table and it's highly likely that one of us will be sitting at that table will see everyone else dead.

Highly likely that one of us will see the rest dead. My mother experienced that in the last two weeks where she is now the only one left of two parents and four sisters.

This is the way our relationships are in this world. But not there. Not there. We are made to desire the kind of relationships, the kind of friendships, the kind of love that is in the kingdom of God.

[25 : 14] We have been designed for what Jesus says heaven is going to be like. And knowing and experiencing the pain of relation to this world, it is so hard for us to imagine what perfect relationships and perfect love actually looks like.

what the experience of that is going to be like. Knowing and experiencing the pain of this world, it's hard to know what it's going to be like.

Hard to believe in fact. Just imagine what it would be like to completely believe it though. That what Jesus says about heaven is actually going to be true. Imagine what it would be to be completely sure of the future because of Jesus Christ and what he's done for us.

Imagine that to believe in Jesus is to be able to live with God and friends in absolute perfect love forever. No barriers, no hindrance to joy and love.

Just imagine what that would do to the way that you would live your life now. would we not use our worldly wealth now knowing that what really lasts is people, relationships, friends, something significant that we all have something to look forward to.

[26 : 43] And so don't put your money before people. Don't put your money before people. Don't put things before people.

Put your money into solving people's needs in this world, the poor and the needy. Use your money, as it says here, to create a fellowship of friends that will survive beyond death.

Friends who you don't even know. You won't even know that they're your friends until you get to heaven. And when people find hope and faith and love in Jesus, they will be your friends and they will be your friends forever.

They will welcome you to heaven. They will love you and be loved by you without any barrier. And so this radical investment is to put the money you're a steward of, which you've been given by, by God, into connecting people with their God who loves them like this without any barriers.

that's the wise investment. Put your money into connecting people with their God who loves them like this.

[28 : 03] Because all of this hope and all this joy is possible because we are recipients of the ultimate love and friendship. 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 are done.

And he doesn't order them to do it. He says, I'm not going to order you to do this. I want you to be compelled by love. And he shows them how to do it. He says, think about this.

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

Relationally rich. experiencing love like you have never experienced before. You see, Jesus is the one friend who emptied himself of everything to turn his enemies into his eternal friends.

Jesus is, in fact, the true steward here. As recipients of the ultimate friendship, we get to live with him forever in perfect love. And so use your money in a way that's controlled by that reality.

[29 : 22] Guess what? You and I, here today, we're in exactly the same boat as the shrewd manager. I'm not sure how long he's, how much notice he was given, how many days or weeks he

had before he had to fold up the books, but in this moment the books were still open, he still had a pen, and he was still in control.

And he acted. He had a chance to act in view of the future, and he did it. And I've been calling two previous congregations, I'm doing the same here, across St.

Paul's today, calling us all to make a radical investment. That's our vision. Our vision says we are desperate for the world around us to encounter Jesus.

We are desperate to make eternal friends. who will love us and whom we will love for eternity. Now, following on from 1 Chronicles 29, the process that King David led Israel in there, for the last, this is our ninth time doing it, in my time here, we have followed a process.

The process is I pledge what my giving is, because I believe if you've read what I wrote and have distributed to the parish in the last week, is that giving is a spiritual matter, it's not a financial matter, and so there's financial accountability for the top right down.

[30 : 49] So Natalie and I, each year, we declare what we're giving, we're the only ones who do it, parish council then follow suit, and staff follow suit. So Natalie and I are seeking to increase our giving for next year, and we're committing \$1,400 a month for our vision, this church's vision, for people to encounter Jesus.

We've also contributed \$1,000 to the \$70,000 target. So far, parish council and staff together have pledged \$3,500 a week, and \$18,200 towards the \$70,000 target.

That is a significant lead from your leaders. That is, parish council and staff make up 10% of the parish in terms of numbers.

And so far, they are giving one-third of our 2018 budget, and a quarter of the project target.

10%, one-third and a quarter. They're leading us in this, and so I would invite you, in fact, I would implore you to follow us and to make an investment in eternal friends.

[32 : 05] We have got enormous opportunities. I would encourage you to see this project of employing someone for children's ministry. There are children coming into our neighbourhood all over the place.

Invest in making friends from the next generation to employ a children's pastor. Takeshi, who was here this morning from Japan, he is a native of the largest unreached people group in the world, and we've got an opportunity to invest in him.

Invest in making eternal friends on another part of the world who will never meet till we get to heaven. And he goes, you are the guys who funded Takeshi.

I'm here because of him. Make your eternal joy complete and invest in eternal friends. I'm going to invite Nick up. What I'm going to do is Nick's going to lead us in a song.

And as he does that, we are going to take an opportunity to sit and reflect. Because some of us may have come prepared, some of us are not prepared at all. But if you've come prepared, you might go, I need to rethink what I've just done because there's not enough gold factor on it, there's not enough sacrifice in it.

[33 : 18] For those of you who haven't prepared, this is an opportunity for you to get these cards out, take the project card out and take the pledge card out. We've already looked at serve, take the project card, the pledge card out. This is an opportunity for you and what the gold factor is going to be for you in your financial commitment to this church.

And I'll come back up in a moment.