

Wealth & Love

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Nick asked us earlier about what you give thanks to God for in the past week.

And I got a message the other day from someone who was sitting in church last week who, as a result of being convicted in terms of the message, but also blown away by the gospel, decided to basically quadruple their giving.

And I just want to say that that's what this series is about. It's about heart work. It's about doing... We're not seeking to raise funds for any particular project, but to do heart work as one of the things that is closest to our hearts in a materialistic world, and to sort of rethink about that from a kingdom of God perspective.

That's what we're seeking to do in this series. So if you'd like to come with me today, which would be great, you've got an outline here with the Bible verses, but also an outline in terms of where we're heading with this passage.

We could take some notes, but also on the St. Paul's app, you can get the same thing and type it all in as well. Let me pray, and then we'll launch into this text. Gracious Father, we thank you for the abundance that you have given us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 21] As we have sung this morning already, in him we can be satisfied, totally satisfied. As your prophet Habakkuk says, that all other things can be stripped away, but because we have Christ, we have God, our Redeemer, then we have everything, everything that we need to get out of bed in the morning and rejoice.

Help us to put our materialism, our money, our resources, all good things that come from you in their proper place. We ask that you would do heart work with us, which would see transformation in our lives and our priorities, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. I want to begin today, as I've done a few times before, reflecting on the life of one of the greatest philosophical thinkers, one of the sharpest political minds, one of the most gifted artists and one of the most quoted individuals of the past 100 years.

Arnold Schwarzenegger was born the son of a low-ranking Austrian police officer and destined for a life of total obscurity, in fact, until his hands wrapped around a barbell for the very first time at 14 years of age.

By the age of 18, he was living in London, travelling the world, competing in bodybuilding championships, and his coach through those years was a guy named Wag Bennett.

[2 : 53] And one day, Wag asked the 18-year-old Arnold Schwarzenegger, what do you want to do with your life? And he said Arnold's response for an 18-year-old was remarkable.

He said he just looked at me and 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.

18 years of age. This is my future. This is what I'm gunning for, and I'm going to go for it. And those who trained with him said he was highly focused.

Highly focused. One day he was doing some sort of press-up thingy with one of his training partners, and this training partner beat Arnold. He did 150, and Arnold did 149, or something like that.

And Arnold looked at him and said, you will never, ever beat me again. He said, no matter what I did, I couldn't do it. So focused.

[4 : 11] Luke 16. Jesus tells a story about a man who saw the future. He knew what he wanted, knew what he wanted to do, what he needed to do, and he just went for it.

He's known as the shrewd manager. Now, in Jesus' time, the manager like this was like a COO, a chief operating officer, and a CFO, a chief financial officer, rolled into one.

They not only managed the whole estate for an owner of an estate, but they also invested the owner's money.

They had control over the finances and chose where it was going to be spent. And it turns out, according to this text, that this manager's been doing a pretty poor job, and so he gets a termination notice, and he's now in trouble.

Word gets around that this manager has not been making some wise decisions, then it's unlikely that he's going to get another management role.

[5 : 22] And he's been sitting in an office for too long to start digging trenches for a living, and he won't lower himself to begging. And what's more, there are no social services.

There's nothing here in terms of center link to fall back on. So for this manager, in this moment, he has a life and death decision. How's he going to live?

What's he going to do? And so he makes a decision in that moment that will pay benefits for him into the future.

Not immediately, into the future. And that's the point of this parable. Living now, making decisions now, that have long-term benefits.

And what he does next is the bit of this parable that I think, if you get caught up in the details, gets a little bit distracting. So here it is, verse 5. So he called in each one of his master's debtors.

[6 : 26] 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, and how much do you owe?

A thousand bushels of wheat, he replied. He told him, take your bill, and make it 800. Now the distracting bit is, you're working on the assumption here, that this manager, is ripping off his master. You pay me the money. You give me 450 gallons of olive oil. That's not really what's happening. But what happens here is, what's the crucial focal point, is the outcome of his actions creates friendships that didn't exist before.

He now has connections and friendships that didn't exist before. In acting for the future, he won the favor and the obligation of his master's debtors. And the master's response, in verse 8, is, the master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.

Why would the owner commend the manager for his action here? One of the best theories is that this manager was putting his own fees on top of the investment, getting his own interest share in it as well as the owner of the investment.

[8 : 10] And this could be the reason why he's been called dishonest in the beginning. You are putting extraordinary fees on top of my assets and getting a cut yourself.

So he's entering into contracts here with very high interest. So the master's getting interest and the owner's getting interest and then it all gets found out.

And so what apparently he's done here is he's now all of a sudden taking his own cut out of it. He's not getting anything more from these deals. Takes his own fees out.

Not only does he make his debtors happy, but he also gives the master a better name in town too. Now that's, well that's exactly how it worked, but it appears that that's how it worked in the first century Palestine.

But the point of Jesus here is that this man is living his life and using his wealth with an eye for the future.

[9 : 13] This master commended him because he had acted shrewdly. It was a good decision. You've made a wise decision, a smart judgment.

You're astute. Or what we might call a rat cunning. Very, very clever move. But the rebuke in the second half of verse 8 is a little bit stinging.

It says this shrewd, this wise, this astute action is one that the disciples of Jesus fail in. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind or with their own generation than are people of the light.

Jesus is saying that this manager is wiser in the use of the master's wealth than his own disciples are in using their master's wealth.

in making long-term investment with their master's wealth. And that's my second point.

[10 : 29] We are God's investment managers. That's the first thing we learn here. We are stewards of someone else's resources. The word manager here is quite literally steward.

This man is a steward of someone else's resources. He is a fund manager if you like. When you manage someone else's funds you can't do anything you want with it because it's not yours. You don't own it. So first up Jesus is saying that if you understand that there is a God at all you've got any concept that there is a God you will know that whatever you have is not yours. We are stewards of God's money of his resources and so we are stop acting as if it's ours. That's pretty hard hitting because we have a strong attachment to our wealth and our possessions because we've worked for it.

We have this sense in the materialistic wealth of the West that we believe in the self-made individual. It's my money. I've worked hard for it.

[11 : 52] I've worked really hard. I deserve this because I work really hard. How often have you heard your self say that? Jesus says no. That's not yours.

If you're a Christian there is a much broader context to put all of this truth into. As Christians we believe that God made everything that he sustains everything that we have life and skills and opportunities that he has gifted us with and without those things we would not make any money at all.

It's not because of us it's because of him. Let me just push this point a little bit further. It is a gift that you happen to exist in Sydney at this particular time and age.

Absolute gift. you would understand it as a gift if you were born 400 years ago and living in a third world country.

Without the gifts we have no capability of doing what we do. Without the life that he gives us day by day we have no ability to have any form of possessions.

[13 : 15] Without life it's extremely difficult to do anything in fact. If you have health and able to work that's a gift. The fact that you're born in this time and place have these opportunities those are gifts.

We work hard for what we have with the life circumstances talents that God has given us we are stewards. And I think that's where 1 Chronicles 29 is really helpful for us because this is the prayer of the fabulously wealthy and powerful King David.

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? Everything comes from you and we have only given to you what has come 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 still belongs to you.

So if we are stewards it's not ours and God calls us to be radically generous. And if we're not radically generous it's not called stinginess or a little bit tight.

[14 : 37] God calls it robbery. You're a fund manager who's taking the funds and investing it elsewhere. You're the dishonest manager is what you are.

It's not just a lack of compassion. It's not just a lack of generosity. It's a lack of integrity. Malachi 3.8 Will a mere mortal rob God?

And yet you rob me. But you ask well how are we robbing you God? In tithes and offerings. As I said last week the people of the Old Testament were told that 10% of their income as a baseline need to be given away.

That's the starting point. That's the baseline. And I'm not convinced the standards of the people in the New Testament are any lower. Especially when they have a greater hope a greater revelation a greater grace greater benefit.

However if you're sitting there at the moment you're thinking 10% is a lot of money then maybe you're approaching it from the wrong direction.

[15 : 52] Imagine imagine this scenario you go to work on Tuesday and someone asks you to manage their money for them and the terms of that were that every year you get to keep 90% of the returns and you've got to give the owner 10% back.

Do you think that's a good deal? What fund manager wouldn't want to sign on the dotted line ASN? You immediately go there's got to be fine print here somewhere.

There must be fine print here somewhere. That's how generous God is and that's what God is offering us. But if we love money more than we love God who gives us those things even those terms won't be enough.

We won't be generous we won't give and it won't be stinginess it's robbery. We are stewards of money that is not ours. And I would suggest I want to go a little bit harder here and I would suggest that includes the estates that you've accumulated over the years.

I want to ask whether even in your will have you included for gospel ministry after you have long gone.

[17 : 19] Even the estates that are in your name are not yours. Imagine stewarding our resources in such a way that in our wills we are also giving a portion to gospel ministry and charity after we have long gone.

Imagine continuing to build rewards in heaven when we are already there. Next point investing in friends.

There's something even more amazing here. This is the connection between wealth and love. Verse 9 is the goal Jesus has in mind with our stewardship of his resources and the goal is our happiness, our love and our security.

I tell you use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

See what this manager does here which is the astute wise thinking is he puts aside short term financial gain for the sake of gaining something that was long term more valuable.

[18 : 41] It's a wise investment is where you put your money into something that will increase in value. That's called a wise investment. And so what can we put our money into that will last forever?

Jesus gives us a very helpful perspective here when he says in verse nine so that when it is gone. He's saying that no matter what investment you put into in this world it will go.

It will not last. You won't take it with you. There is no material thing, no asset, no piece of property where you can put your money into that will really really really last.

And he's calling his disciples to put their money into something that will literally last forever. Use your money in such a way that there is glory in the end.

need. Now what I love about the way that Jesus puts it here is that he doesn't say, he doesn't just stay there at some sort of abstract level.

[19 : 59] Now because for me personally I'm logically convinced I'm just kind of the way that I'm wired I think long term about most stuff. And I'm logically convinced by the argument for long term investment that grows in value forever.

Logically, yeah got that, that makes sense to me. What Jesus says next however is the thing that if you like moves the heart and causes me to open the wallet and the bank balance.

And I hope it does for you too. Look at how Jesus describes the eternal dwelling in verse 9. friends. Friends.

Use your money now to gain friends who will welcome you into eternal dwellings. Let me quote one commentator who wrote on this verse.

It is in his view the main point of this parable. although these things, your property, ability, time, belong to this life only, says Jesus, yet what will happen to you then when you pass into that life will depend on what you are doing with them here and now.

[21 : 20] Make sure that your use of them brings you into a fellowship of friends which will survive beyond death.

A fellowship of friends that survives beyond death. Now this is definitely what Jesus is saying here. You see, because we look to money to give us the security and the significance in our culture, but genuine security and significance is relational.

It's not material. In the end, the thing we all need is love. Every single one of us needs love. We feel truly wealthy when we are loving people and are surrounded by people who love us back.

The person who has got great bank balance, got a secure piece of property, they got their retirement funds sorted, but is totally lonely, doesn't think for a moment, that they're wealthy, when all the relationships around them are breaking down.

And yet, the love that we're seeking for in this life is consistently out of reach for us. Money can't buy you love.

[22 : 49] love. You can get a taste of the love we're searching for in this world, but the best is yet to come.

That's what Jesus promises. The thinking that heaven is a place of harps and crowns and clouds and gold doesn't kind of move me so much in terms of wanting to be there as a world of love does. Heaven is a place of friendships, a place of deep relationships, a place of real love, a place where we love and we are loved without any barriers at all.

It's a place to really hope for and invest in now. The love we experience in this world is a foretaste of what will be, but it falls way short of what it will be in heaven.

Love now is all too often a source of pain. There are barriers of loving and being loved in this world that won't exist in heaven and that makes heaven an incredible prospect.

[23 : 55] I've got a list of a variety of barriers that we have now for love. One barrier that we face now that we want them is that we are often not loved for our own sake in this world, which the person who has got more and more possessions and wealth always has in the back of their mind.

Am I being loved because of what I have or because of who I am? It's painful when we discover that people are not loving us for our own sake, but actually using us to get to something else or to someone else.

It's very rare for any of us to love another person totally for their own sake. Most love in order to get something.

In heaven we will be loved absolutely and completely and fully for who we are. Another barrier is the inability to express love without hindrance, pride, selfishness, defensiveness, pettiness, coldness, means that we can't do it.

This is even the case with those who we are the closest to in this world. It's like having an ocean of love in the heart that it can only get expressed through a straw.

[25 : 25] We can't even get close to expressing our love fully without hindrance. But in heaven we will love without impediment.

All sin, all pride, all selfishness, pettiness, defensiveness will be gone. We also struggle to find a mutual love in this world. Is there anything more painful than to love someone and not to be loved back?

It's very rare for love to be mutual at the same time. In this life, many of the people that we love, we love them more than they in fact love us back. That is nothing but pain.

But in heaven everyone will love everyone else mutually and fully. There's also the barrier of the happiness of those that you love. Think about this for a moment.

Once you start, and if you're a parent, you'll know this, once you start having children, for the rest of your life, you are no more happier than your unhappiest child.

[26 : 38] Well, there's an incentive to have kids. But you get that, don't you? You're no more happier than your unhappiest child. We can never be any happier than the people that we love, and that's the reason why most of us are so miserable.

Their heart becomes our heart. If you love more than five people in your life at any one time, you're bound to be miserable.

Someone's going to be unhappy. The great C.S. Lewis said, if you don't want your heart to be broken, then just stop loving people.

Maybe you know those kinds of people who have got that happening for them. That is the only option, and some of us, in fact, find it so difficult to love anyone because we are so broken in our hearts inside.

We are so damaged. And of course, you become a hard person, and let me say it clearly, you are right on your way to hell.

[27 : 57] Love is such a source of pain, but not in heaven. Everyone will be perfectly happy and filled with a never ceasing joy. The greatest barrier to love would have to be the separation.

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.

In my case, I've got five people sitting around the table at home, and it's highly likely that one of us will be sitting at that table, will see everyone else dead and gone.

One of us will be put in that position. And as a type one diabetic, it's unlikely to be me. I think.

That's my mother's experience in the last couple of years. One of four sisters, all gone, only one left.

[29 : 08] And that's the way of our relationships here, love. But not there. Not there. We are made to desire the kind of relationships, friendships, and love that is in the kingdom of God.

We have been designed for what Jesus says heaven is going to be like, knowing and experiencing the pain of relationships in this world. It is hard for us to imagine it, hard to believe in fact.

Just imagine what it would be like to completely believe in it, though, that that is what heaven is going to be like. That is my future. Imagine what it will do to your life day by day when you grasp that that is the joy and the reality that I'm shooting for.

Imagine what it would be like to be completely sure of the future because of Jesus Christ and what he's done. Imagine that to believe in Jesus is to be able to live with God and friends in absolute perfection, perfect love forever, love without any boundaries forever.

Just imagine what it will do with the way you live now. Imagine what it will do to your possessions and your money. Knowing that real, what really lasts is love, people, relationships, friends, do not put your money before people which is what our materialistic society says you must do.

[30 : 50] Put your money into solving people's needs. Use your money to create a fellowship of friends that will survive beyond death.

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

That's the radical investment that Jesus is calling us to. To put the money that you are a steward of into connecting people with their God who loves them in a way that is incomprehensible to them.

Now all of this hope and joy is possible because we ourselves are recipients of this ultimate love and friendship.

In 1 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.

[32 : 00] And he doesn't order them to do it. He showed them how they can do it. And what he does is he shows them love. He says just think about Jesus.

Think about Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor. He divested himself of everything so that you through his action of diversity himself of everything that you might become rich.

You might know true wealth. You might know love without barriers. Jesus is the one friend who emptied himself of everything to turn his enemies into his friends.

Jesus is the true steward. As recipients of the ultimate friendship we get to live with him forever in perfect love and he's calling us here in this passage to use your money in a way that is controlled by that knowledge.

So friends right now right now you and I sitting in this room while we have breath in our lungs we're in exactly the same boat as the shrewd manager when he got his termination notice.

[33 : 24] The books are still open and you've still got a chance to act right now in view of the future. make your eternal joy complete and invest in eternal friends.