

Generous Investing

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. We are continuing our journey with Jesus. As he resolutely set his face to Jerusalem, focused on the way there in order to die for the sins of humanity.

And so I want to begin today by quoting, as I have, in fact, a few times in the past, quoting one of the greatest philosophical thinkers, one of the sharpest political minds, one of the most gifted artists and possibly the most quoted individual of the past 100 years.

Arnold Schwarzenegger was born the son of a low-ranking Austrian police officer. And he was destined for a life of obscurity until his hands wrapped around a barbell for the very first time when he was 14 years old.

By the time he was 18, he was living in London and travelling the world competing in bodybuilding championships. When he was 18, at that time, his coach, a guy named Wag Bennett, asked the young Arnold, Arnie, what is it that you want to do with your life?

And Wag said, I've never heard such a clear statement from such a young person.

[1 : 27] He said, I want to be the richest and greatest bodybuilder of all time. I want to live in the United States. I want to be a movie actor, a movie director.

I want to own an apartment block and I want to be a politician. His teammates said of him at that point, whenever Arnold fixed his mind on something, he could never be dissuaded from it.

And whenever you beat him in any way in training, he would look at you and say, you will never do that again. He worked and worked and worked to be the best.

That is, the point that I'm trying to make from Arnold Schwarzenegger, who I don't think is actually the most gifted of artists, or the sharpest political minds, or the greatest philosophical thinkers, the point that I want to make is someone so young sees the future and he just goes for it.

He sees life planned out for him. He sees what he wants for the future to be. And he works now day in and day out in order for that to be his future.

[2 : 43] And so as we open up Luke 16, Jesus tells a similar story about a manager who saw the future. So grab your Bibles. Luke 16.

And also the St. Paul's app has got an outline for today's talk in it. This is a manager who knew what he needed, what he needed to do now in order to ensure that his life in the future was the way that he wanted it to be, that it was secure.

And he just went for it. So first of all, first point is wise investing if you're looking at the St. Paul's app. The manager like this in the first century Palestine managed the owner's estate and also invested his money.

So he was sort of like a chief operation officer and a CFO as well. This manager has been doing a poor job. And so he gets a termination notice.

And so at this point he's in trouble. See, when word gets around that this manager has not done a great job in managing, he's not likely to get another manager's job.

[3 : 52] He's been sitting too long in an office to start digging trenches for a living. And he won't lower himself personally to start begging on the streets. And there's no social services in first century Palestine.

And so this is a big question of how am I going to live? How am I going to live? How am I going to survive? Is the question.

And so he makes a decision in that moment that will ensure that his future is secure and that it continues to pay benefits for him.

That's the key idea in this story. But it's the details around the story that's somewhat distracting. Here it is, verse 5. Now the master's response in this is in verse 8.

Now the dishonesty bit is connected to his management experience.

[5 : 19] It's connected to the first bit of the parable. He's commended here by the manager. Why would the manager commend him for this?

One of the best theories is that the manager had been, in his dishonesty, had been adding his own fees to the master's investments.

Putting his own slice on top of it. Now this could be the right reason why he's called dishonesty. The manager, the master, sorry, was getting interest.

Sorry, the manager was getting interest on the investment. As well as the master getting interest on the investment. And so at this point, it's quite, the best plausible option is that the manager, when negotiating here, is taking his own fees out of it.

And not only does he make these debtors happy, but he also gives the master a great name around town. Now whether that's exactly how it worked, Jesus' point is the man is living his life, he's using his wealth, in this moment, his opportunities, everything he has with an eye on the future.

[6 : 45] And the master here commends the manager because he acted shrewdly. That is, you have made a really wise decision.

You've acted very cunningly. But the second half of verse 8 is kind of hard to hear because what Jesus is saying here, this is to his disciples, he's saying this is something that, you guys don't do that well.

He's saying here, this is something that Christians fail in. It's a rebuke. He says, for the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind, more shrewd in dealing with their own generation, than are people of the light.

He's saying here, you've got the Arnold Schwarzeneggers of this world who know what they want to achieve, they've got their investment portfolio that they want to get, and they work for it.

They have their life focused on achieving that. He's saying, but the people of the kingdom are not so shrewd. Which gets me to the second point of what we think life is about and we are God's investment managers.

[8 : 11] The first thing we learn is that we are all stewards of someone else's resources. That's what Jesus is saying here, is that we, people of the kingdom, are this manager.

We are stewards of someone else's resources. We're not the master, we're the managers. The word manager here can be translated as steward.

This man is managing someone else's money. And as a fund manager, as a steward of someone else's resources, you can't do whatever you want with those resources.

They're not yours. See, if we understand that there is a God, we'll know that whatever we have ultimately comes from him and it's not ours.

Now, that's pretty hard for us to hear in our modern society because we have such an attachment to our wealth and our possessions. It's mine. I've worked hard. I've done this.

[9 : 21] And yet, as a Christian, there is a much broader theological picture, context to put this into. Christians believe that God made everything and that he sustains everything and that every single human being has life, has skills, has opportunities that he has gifted us with.

And without those gifts, we would not make any money at all. Without the life he gives us day by day, without the skills he gives us, we'd have no ability to make money.

Now, that is particularly hard. What I've just said is very hard for anyone with a Western mindset to grapple with. Western individualism. We just think poor people in the world need to pull their socks up and try a bit harder.

The reality is if we were born in a particular time in this world, in particular places in this world, we would have no ability to advance ourselves whatsoever.

It's a gift that what you have now in this time and this day is a gift. It's a gift to be healthy enough to work.

[10 : 46] and being born in this time and this place and all its opportunities is nothing more than a gift. We work with the life, the circumstances, the talents that God has given us.

We are stewards of it all. Let me just point you to a prayer. A prayer that the fabulously wealthy and powerful King David prayed in 1 Chronicles 29.

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 given you only what comes from your hand. All this abundance that we have provided for building your temple for your holy name comes from your

hand and it all belongs to you.

As stewards of God's resources what are his expectations conditions of how we might manage his resources.

[12:01] It's a term we keep using here regularly at St. Paul's radical generosity. That is if we are not being radically generous it's fraud.

It's robbery. It's not just a lack of compassion or it's not just a lack of integrity. It's fraud and robbery. In fact Malachi chapter 3 verse 8 says that's exactly what it is.

Will a mere mortal rob God yet you rob me but you ask well how are we robbing you? In tithes and offerings. The people of the Old Testament were told that 10% of their income needed to be given away as a starting point.

That was the starting point. The New Testament standards are not lower than that. Especially when we have a greater hope when we have a greater revelation we have a greater grace and we have a greater benefit.

If we think that 10% is an awful lot of money then maybe we're entirely thinking about this investment idea from the wrong way. The wrong perspective.

[13:16] Imagine I'm an investment I'm a wealthy man and imagine and I get I sign you on to be my investment manager and I say to you these are the terms you get to keep 90% of everything that's produced 90% of everything that's produced for your living expenses and you just need to give me back 10% each year.

I mean anyone want to sign up to that deal? Anyone? No one's going to knock back those terms. That is how incredibly generous this God is. But if we love money more as the Pharisees did than God himself then frankly those terms won't be enough.

We are stewards of money that is not ours. And what is the goal of our stewardship? Third point, investing in France. I think this is the amazing thing here.

Verse 9 is the goal Jesus has in mind with our stewardship of his resources. The goal is ultimately our happiness, our love, our security.

[14:42] The goal is a circle of friends. That's incredible. He says, I tell you use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves.

He could have said use my wealth to gain friends for me, but he says use wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it's gone you'll be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

And the point of that is that these friends will welcome you into the eternal dwelling. So this manager here puts aside short-term financial gain for the sake of gaining something that was long-term more valuable and that is networks and friends.

Networks and friends. Every single wise investment, as my investment manager tells me, and it makes a lot of sense, is where you put your money into something that will increase in value.

I mean, that's just no-brainer, right? Increase in value. And the point here is put your money into something that will truly last, really last.

[16:07] Jesus gives us a very helpful perspective here when he says in verse 9, so that when it is gone, when it is gone, in other words, there is no investment in this world that will last.

Not a single investment will last. There is no material thing, there is no asset, there is no place where you put your money that will really, really last.

And he's calling his disciples here to put their money into something that will literally last forever. Building up a circle of eternal friends.

And he puts it in relational terms. Relational terms. Use your money in such a way that you make friends, eternal friends for yourself.

What I love about the way Jesus puts it here, he doesn't just stay on the abstract level. Now, I'm, as a forward-thinking person, logically convinced by the argument for long-term investment that grows in value forever.

[17:25] I'm logically convinced by that. But what Jesus says next is what moves my heart and it causes me to open my wallet and I hope it does for you.

You see how Jesus describes the eternal dwelling in verse nine? Friends. That's it. Friends.

Not clouds and harps and hymns. Friends. That's heaven. Friends. Friends.

Use your money now to gain friends who will welcome you into eternal dwelling. Let me just quote one commentator who wrote on this verse. It's the main point of the 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 were doing with them here and now.

[18 : 33] And make sure that your use of them brings you into a fellowship of friends which will survive beyond death. See the point?

We look in the materialistic west, we look to our money to give us security and significance. But genuine security and significance is ultimately relational, not material. It's relational, not material.

In the end, all we need is love. We feel truly wealthy when we are loving people and surrounded by people who love us back.

That's when you feel truly wealthy. And the older you get, the more that value increases. That's when you feel truly alive.

[19 : 36] love. And yet the love that we all need is ultimately out of reach in this life.

We get a taste of it now, just a taste of it, but the best is yet to come. You see, the thinking that heaven is a place of harps and crowns and gold doesn't move me in the same way as it being a place of people, relationships, connection, love.

A place of friendships, deep relationships, real love. A love where there is no barriers. And it's a place that you can hope in now and invest for and put your investment into it now.

the love that we have in this world, the taste of the relationship we have in this world is a foretaste of what will be, but every single relationship in this world falls short of it.

Fall short of it. And it makes heaven such an incredible prospect. So I just want to throw some barriers to genuine and real love that we have in this world now that won't be then.

[20 : 57] For instance, in this world we are not often loved for our own sake. It's actually quite painful when we discover that people are not loving us for our own sake, but actually using us to get something.

It's very rare for people, for any of us, to love another person completely, totally for their own sake. Most of us love love to get something out of it.

And in heaven, we will be loved absolutely and completely and fully for who we are without any barriers.

Another barrier is the ability to express love without hindrance. Pride, selfishness, defensiveness, pettiness, coldness, means that we can very rarely express love without any hindrance.

It's like so many of us describe it as having an ocean of love in the heart that can only be expressed through a straw. It's there, I just can't get it out.

[22 : 09] I'm too afraid to actually let it all, just in case you reject it. we can't get close to expressing our love without hindrance but in heaven we will love without any form of impediment or sin or pride or selfishness or pettiness or defensiveness will be gone.

We also struggle to find a mutual love in this world. Is there anything more painful than to love someone more than they love you back? It is very rare for love to be mutual all the time.

I mean all the time. In this life many of the people we love we love them more than they love us back and there is nothing more painful.

But in heaven everyone will love everyone else mutually and fully. There's also the barrier of the unhappiness of those you love.

Think about this for a moment. This is for the parents in the room. Once you start having children sorry guys I know you're launching into this real soon.

[23 : 30] Once you start having children for the rest of your life you are never happier than the unhappiness of your children of your unhappiest child.

You are never happier than your unhappiest child. We can never be happier than the people that we love.

Their heart becomes our heart. If you love more than five people in your life you will always be unhappy. And that's why C.S.

Lewis said if you don't want your heart to be broken then stop loving people. That's the only option. Just pull back from everyone.

Of course at that point you become such a hard person and you are frankly right on your way to hell. At that point. Love is such an incredible source of pain but not in heaven.

[24 : 36] Everyone will be perfectly happy and filled with a never ceasing joy. But ultimately the greatest barrier to love is separation. We want a love that will never be separated from the people that we love.

Ultimately that's the greatest pain. My family is going through my extended family is going through that right now. Some of you will be aware of this. Little Teddy died a couple of days ago.

And so the separation of that love for my family, the grief that they're feeling right now, a baby less than two weeks old. That's the pain, that's separation.

We are made to desire the kind of relationships and 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 relations with this world is, it's hard for us to imagine what heaven's going to be like. And yet that's the problem of loving this world.

[25 : 52] And ultimately it's the separation from those that we love. It's one of the greatest difficulties about getting older. as you get older your circle of friends disappears.

My grandmother died at 102, didn't have a single friend left. All gone. Over the course of 40 years saw them all die off.

That's the pain of separation. So what would it be like, imagine, what would it be like to be completely sure of the future because of what Jesus Christ has achieved for us.

Imagine that to believe in Jesus is to be able to live with God and to live with friends in absolute perfect love forever without any barriers, forever.

Just imagine how that would change your perspective of life right now. Would we not use our worldly wealth now knowing what really lasts ultimately is love, is people, is relationships, is friends, and that ultimately as life moves on for me and I feel the pain of loss of love in this world that I have the greatest love to look forward to, the best is yet to come.

[27 : 29] Use your money now to create a fellowship of eternal friends. When people find hope and love and faith in Jesus, they will be your friends forever.

I just think it's incredible to imagine that I could be in heaven and I could be in heaven for a thousand years and people are being added into that over that course of time because somehow it's been connected to my investment.

The radical investment is to put the money that you are a steward of into connecting people with their God who will love him and love you forever.

Why would we do this? Ultimately, we are recipients of the wisest of investments. All of this hope and joy is possible because we have received ultimate love and ultimate friendship in Jesus.

2 Corinthians 8, the apostle Paul is encouraging the church of Corinth to give generously to a great need in the same way that other churches had done previously.

[28 : 49] He doesn't order them to do it. He doesn't order them to do it. He shows them how they can do it and he shows them love.

He says, just think about this for a minute. Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.

What he's showing the church of Corinth there and he's showing us is Jesus is the one friend. He's the master but he became the one friend who emptied himself of everything to turn his enemies into his friends.

For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross. We are his joy. 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 to use our time, our talents, our gifting, our treasures, all of it is controlled by that knowledge.

[30 : 11] And so right now today you and I are in exactly the same position as this shrewd manager. The books were open and he had a chance to act.

He had a chance to act. So what's your next step? What's your next step? Make your eternal joy complete and invest in eternal friends.

Thanks. Thank you.