

# Wealth & Grace

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening all. Great if you had your Bibles open, Luke 14, or have one of these in front of you. Service outline, it's got where we're headed, so you can follow that along, or on the St. Paul's app, so you can get it all there instead. So as you notice tonight, if you've got one of these, I've only got two points. Don't think you're getting out early, but we've got two points, so it should be easier to follow. A couple of weeks ago, James was here, standing up here, and he was liberally throwing money around, \$10. And so here's mine. Actually, I borrowed it.

\$10. And I want to ask you, what would you do in order to get \$10? What would you do in order to get \$10? I'll tell you what I did. A number of years ago, I was out with a friend. We were fishing, and there wasn't a lot happening, which generally happens when I go fishing. And nothing much was happening, and we're sitting there on the side of this river bank, and we had a bucket of dirt in it with earthworms. And he pulled one of them out, and he said, I'll give you \$10 if you eat this thing. And I said, well, show me the \$10. And so he put the \$10 there, and I got my bottle of water, washed it down. I went straight down. Basically, just like a big, thick piece of spaghetti, piece of cake, until it got to about here. And unlike a piece of spaghetti, this thing was still alive. And so I don't know if you've ever had the feeling of something moving inside your chest, but it's a very disconcerting feeling. And so half a litre of Coke, and boom, solved that problem.

Not a problem at all. So that's what I did for \$10. That was many years ago, I must add. What would you do for \$10? What would you do? In that moment, you're going to do some sort of cost-benefit analysis in order to grab your \$10 and go, yeah, that'd be worth it. It'd be worth me doing that for \$10. Or what about \$10 million? What would you do in order to get \$10 million?

Again, cost-benefit analysis. There was a survey around a number of years ago that, in fact, asked that question, what would you prepare to do in order to get \$10 million? 25% of respondents said that they would abandon their families. 16% said that they would leave their spouse. 3% said they'd put their kids up for adoption. We didn't fill it out, kids. It's all right.

[ 2 : 47 ] That is another one of those price tag moments. It's one of those moments we face every day, the price tag moment where we look at the price and we go, am I prepared to do that? Am I prepared to pay that in order to get this item? Am I prepared to hand my money over? What am I prepared to also do in order to get the money? We do this constant cost-benefit analysis in our heads and our hearts. And that's what we're doing in this series. If you've joined us today, we're spending a number of weeks on a topic of wealth with purpose. We're looking at the value of money, wealth, how in fact we attach so much value to money and wealth and possessions. As I've said a couple of weeks ago, our perspective on money, wealth, possessions, how we handle them lies at the heart of the Christian faith. What we do with them influences eternity. And as I said, I've got two things to say. You see it on your outline there. Jesus' astonishing standard that he has for giving and grace and the astonishing standard. That is how the grace of Jesus makes this astonishing standard of giving seem reasonable. It's the logic of grace that he brings in. So Luke 14 is our text in front of us tonight. Jesus is at a dinner party. That's where it opens. He's at the home of a prominent

Pharisee. He has no friends here amongst these religious elite at this gathering. And what Jesus sets out to do is he sets out to expose their hearts and how their religion is just a veneer for them. So this dinner party is a typical dinner party. Notice verse seven. It says, when he, that's Jesus, Jesus noticed how the guests picked the place of honor at the table. He told them this parable. So the way it worked, as it works in most cases, the host would have the place of honor and then everyone else is seated at the dinner party according to how important they were to the host. Naturally, everyone is trying to be seated as close to the host as possible. And then Jesus says this to the host in verse 12, when you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends, your

brothers or sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbors. If you do, they may invite you back and so you'll be repaid. The Greco-Roman world of Jesus' time was a very much a class orientated society. It was all about people being connected to people and especially people at the top. The people at the top would engage with people a few steps below them in the social run because they could use those people for personal gain. And all these relationships and allegiances and power networks were conducted through hospitality. That's what's happening here in Luke 14.

[ 6 : 14 ] You brought these people into your home and then they owed you a favor. It's the patronage system. Plenty of parts of the world still operate like it today. England was like it a couple of hundred years years ago. If you wanted to improve your standing in society, your position in life, you wanted to move up, you needed to get connected to a patron. A patron would give you loans and gifts and open doors for you.

A patron, as their network grew, so did their influence in society because they had all these people under them who owed them stuff. Adrian, can you get my bottle of water which is behind you there? And so in Jesus' time, thanks mate, in Jesus' time, you only invited people into your home or went to someone else's home if you knew you could get something out of it. It's not just see me, you know, let's just get together and hang out. It is social climbing. You are there to gain something from the gathering. That's the context of this gathering that Jesus is in in Luke 14.

People are trying to meet other people. You are either attempting to sustain relationships with significant people or you're trying to gain new people for your network that it would grow and your influence would grow and it's all commercial transactions.

This is about personal advancement. This is no simple gathering. It's an extremely important gathering and lots of money was spent on these gatherings because it always paid dividends.

[ 8 : 10 ] Business deals are done. Money is transacted. Further advancement in society. So here's Jesus at one of these gatherings and he has the audacity to say to this host, the patron, verse 12, when you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbours. In other words, the sort of people who are currently sitting around the table with you, if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid, which of course how the system worked. And then Jesus suggests how it should work.

This is how his disciples should live. But when you give a banquet, you invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

Now when Jesus says here, you know, don't invite your friends, don't invite your brothers and sisters, your neighbours, your relatives, he's using an idiom. He's not saying you must never, ever invite a friend or relative into your home ever again. Could you imagine how that would go down? You know, you've just become a Christian, you just need to email all friends and relatives and say, listen, it's been nice, but no more. I've just become a Christian and I'm working really hard on praying Luke 14.

That's not what Jesus is saying here. But he is saying something pretty radical. He is talking about priorities and worldview.

[ 10 : 14 ] You see, this parable is about generosity. It's about pervasive generosity. It's about all of life generosity. And he's saying that for his disciple, they're giving to charity and ministry, even though money's not mentioned here, it's talking about a pervasive lifestyle of generosity. They're giving to charity and ministry should be more than what they spend on advancing themselves in society.

He's saying that what we should, sorry, he isn't saying that you should never spend money on yourself, but he is saying that what we give to ministry and charity ought to be more.

The implications of this, of what he's saying here is massive. He is suggesting at least two things about a life of pervasive generosity.

He's saying firstly that our giving to ministry and charity must be a priority, must be the priority. And secondly, it must be sacrificial. Priority and sacrificial.

So the first implication is about the priorities of our lives. And the very next section in Luke 14, what follows this parable, is Jesus making this opening statement.

[ 11 : 41 ] If anyone comes to me and does not hate father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, such a person cannot be my disciple. Now again, he's using an idiom. He's using the exact sort of idea is what he's done before.

He isn't saying literally, become a Christian, you must hate everyone. You know, that's the core of understanding that you're a disciple of mine, is you just hate everyone.

That's not what he's saying. What he is saying, he's highlighting priority. He's saying that compared to your love for me, it will look like all other loves are just so, well, it will kind of look like that we hate in comparison because your love for me will be so high.

So he's saying here to this host, a life of generosity is a necessity. It's a necessity.

What is optional, what is negotiable is the money that we spend on ourselves. And most of us are going to be challenged by that.

[ 12 : 55 ] Most of us sitting here in this room are going to be challenged by that. And most of us are going to need to switch that, reverse it, change our priorities.

And that includes those who have got to what I've said in the last couple of weeks about tithing, 10% Old Testament. You've got there and you've been sitting comfortably there for years. You haven't shifted from that point. You see, all of us have financial goals or lifestyle goals. There are certain ways you want to live. There are holidays you want to take. There are clothes you want to buy.

There are things you want to do, places we want to live. If we have enough money to do all of that, and we have some money left over for charity and ministry, well then we will give.

The charity and ministry, we've got stuff left over. That is how most people work in the church. And I say that because the average Christian gives less than 2% of their income away.

[ 13 : 58 ] Ministry and charity is the option, but spending money on ourselves is the priority or it becomes a necessity for us.

And Jesus says, switch them. Forget about your friends and your relatives and your rich neighbors. Switch them. Once upon a time, there was a cattle farmer.

This cattle farmer was delighted to discover that a cow that he didn't expect to have a calf was in fact going to have a calf. And says, this is fantastic. This calf will be born and I'll raise the calf and I'm going to be able to sell it off for a tidy profit.

And to his delight, this cow in fact had twins. Two calves, double the money. Very excited. And so he goes to his wife, declares to her that when the sale is complete, I'm going to give the proceeds of one of these calves to the work of the ministry of our local church and to some charity.

And his wife is like, well, that's just so spiritual, so impressive. You're going to give a whole cow away, a calf away and just generous and a righteous act. And a few weeks later, he comes into the homestead and he's really downcast, really downcast because he's just come back from the paddock and discovered that one of the calves has in fact died.

[ 15 : 15 ] And his wife says to him, what's the matter? And he's, oh, I'm just so disappointed. He said, the Lord's calf has just died. You see, the point is in our life is it's always the Lord's calf.

In other words, there are certain clothes we want to buy, certain holidays we want to have, certain places we want to live. And that is the priority. And if there's enough left over for ministry and charity, then we will.

But if we're in any form of a pinch at all, then ministry and charity gets cut back. Jesus says, switch them. Old Testament language of the first fruits.

You give money in the Old Testament, you gave money first to the ministry, the tabernacle, the Levites and to the poor. And you lived on what's left over.

You didn't live and then give what's left over. So this, of course, means that not only does our giving have a priority, but it also needs to be sacrificial.

[ 16 : 29 ] This passage here goes along with all the rest of the passage of the Bible on giving. I've said it twice so far in the last couple of weeks. Standard for giving was very clear.

10% tithing in the Old Testament. 10% went to the Levites, the poor, the ministry, the tabernacle. That is basically ministry and charity. And there's one place in the New Testament where Jesus says that you should tithe.

It's in Luke 11 verses 42 and 43, where he's talking to the Pharisees about their tithing. And Jesus doesn't say to them, oh, no, that's Old Testament principle.

You need a New Testament. It's kind of open slather. He doesn't do that. He actually encourages them in their tithing. And so, in other words, Jesus isn't against the idea of a tithe, but it doesn't actually get mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament except Luke 11.

Instead, we've got statements like 2 Corinthians 8, where Paul is encouraging the Corinthian Christians to give money to the poor in Jerusalem.

[ 17 : 34 ] And he reminds them there of the Macedonian Christians of what they had already given. And he says this in verse 3. I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability.

Even beyond their ability. When we say, well, look, I'd really like to give more, but I just can't afford to.

What we mean is we can't afford to give without sacrificing. That's what we mean. And that's the point Jesus is making.

Your giving must be sacrificial. The Old Testament tithe is a good starting point. It's the baseline. It's the measuring tape by which we measure our heart and whether we're even remotely aligned to God's purposes.

But we know when we are really giving is when it hurts. Sacrifice means there are things that we can't do because we're giving.

[ 18 : 47 ] Places we can't go because we're giving. Places we can't live because we're giving. That is the New Testament, gospel-fueled, spirit-empowered standard.

And I gather by the fact that there's so much quietness in the room right now that you're thinking, well, that's just shocking.

That is impossible. That is just so unreasonable. And it is pretty shocking. It makes me think about my priorities.

I wrestle with this. And I've been doing wrestling with this over the last number of weeks and continue to wrestle with this. And I've got to tell you, I'm not standing up here saying, I've got this all sorted.

So how come you've not got it all sorted? I'm not doing that. We all need to stand under this text and look at it. You see, when the great John Newton, the Anglican minister of amazing grace fame, looked at this passage, he found it very troubling.

[ 19 : 58 ] He said, he wrote this, No matter how he read it, no matter which way he cut it, his conclusion was, he should have been giving away a lot more than he already was.

Sound unreasonable? Not if we understand the gospel of the Lord Jesus. His grace to us helps us to see this in a very new light. And that's my second point.

There are three ways that Jesus uses the gospel to help us to see this kind of use of money is in fact entirely reasonable.

In these verses, he's got three speeches in here. He speaks to all of the guests in verses 8 to 11. In the middle, he speaks to the host in verses 12 to 14.

And finally, he speaks to one smug guest in the parable of the great banquet from 15 onwards. In every one of these speeches, he shows us how the gospel helps us see why it is very reasonable to be sacrificial in our giving and to make it a priority.

[ 21 : 33 ] First of all, he speaks to everyone. Verses 7 to 11, we'll pick it up in verse 8. When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor. For a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, Hey, give this person your seat. Then humiliated, you will take the least important place.

But when you are invited, take the lowest place. So when the host comes, you'll say, Hey friend, move on up to a better place. Then you'll be honored in the presence of all the other guests. This is really simple advice, practical advice.

You see this working right across society. For instance, I don't know, I've never been there. I've never experienced it. I don't know anyone who's ever walked into a wedding reception and go, Wow, that table up there.

I'll see everything from there. I'll go and sit there. You know the one in the middle where they've got special food and I'll go and sit there. I don't know anyone who's just gone and ponked themselves in the middle of, They just know that you're not invited there.

[ 22 : 43 ] Unless, of course, you're the bride or the groom. It's really practical advice. Don't be the kind of person who has to be the center of attention because people won't like you.

It was said of President Eisenhower. In fact, his daughter said of him, He wanted to be the corpse at every funeral and the bride at every wedding. Don't be the kind of person who has to be the center

of attention because people won't like you.

The irony is that if you're a self-promoter, you won't get promoted because people will resent you. It's better if others speak well of you than if you speak well of yourself.

But Jesus is not just being pragmatic because in verse 11, He takes this principle and makes it the core of spiritual reality.

It's not just good advice. This is at the core of spiritual reality. It says, For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

[ 23 : 47 ] Notice the word all. This is, in other words, true for everyone. This is the core of spiritual reality.

If anyone goes to God and think that they deserve acceptance with God, you will receive rejection because it shows that you don't actually know what's in your own heart.

If you go to God knowing you deserve rejection and asking for forgiveness, then you will find acceptance because you know what's in your own heart.

That's the gospel. That is the basic and great news of the Christian faith. If with God we take the lowest seat, He will exalt us.

God taking us from the lowest place and giving us the place of honor and acceptance and value, what it does for you is it fills you up on the inside.

[ 24 : 47 ] It fills your sense of worth and identity up because you are down there in the pit and He has grabbed you. You know you're unworthy.

You know you're a sinner. You know you've rejected Him. And He's taken you from there and He's given you the place of honor forever. When you feel worthless, He says you are worthy.

You see, your whole sense of identity and worth shifts. Other people's assessment of your worth is nowhere near as important as God's approval.

And what happens is when God exalts us in the gospel, then money becomes money. That's what it is. It's just mere currency.

It is no longer your source of security. It's no longer your source of hope, your source of identity. It's no longer your self-esteem. It's no longer your source of value, which is how it works in the Western world.

[ 25 : 56 ] When God is in the center of our lives, we don't have to be constantly scrambling to be at the top and in the place of honor, trying to get more security, more prosperity, more money, more status, like the guests at this dinner party.

Jesus' disciples have been exalted by God. And therefore, they're not scrambling. Now, this doesn't mean that Christians can't be successful.

They can certainly be successful. It just should not be the passion of your life. The Christian's inner wealth should make it easy for them to divest themselves of their external wealth.

That is the logic of grace and how it leads to a life of generosity. The second speech is in verses 12 to 14, and it is directed at the host of the party.

We've already looked at this one briefly, but what we haven't looked at is the end of it. Have a look at the last sentence of verse 14. One of the thoughts that Christians have had, and I've heard it articulated, expressed so many times, is that to be a disciple of Jesus, you miss out on life.

[ 27 : 29 ] You miss out on life. Basically, what you do is you endure a miserable life now in the hope that you can get heaven, and it'll be much better back then, in those days.

And many people, in fact, reject Christianity because, in fact, they don't want to miss out on life.

Miss out on trips and experiences and lifestyles because of this call to generosity. And Jesus says, Oh, you don't understand what life's about.

He says, No, no, no, that's not the worst at all. And he says, No, that's not. You don't miss out because of the resurrection. There is no missing out on life as a Christian.

You just need to see your life in a much grander picture. Because of Jesus' resurrection, the eternal future for Christians is perfect bodies, perfect relationships, in perfect paradise.

The Maldives have got nothing on heaven. The kingdom of God is a feast. It is an eternal party.

[ 28 : 35 ] Nothing is held back. Nothing is missing. We'll eat and drink and laugh and love and talk and sing and hug forever, and we will never grow tired of it.

There will never be any end of it. All the jubilees and carnivals and banquets and fiestas and laughter and festivities of a thousand years of human history won't even come close to the wonder and the glory and the joy of the celebration which the God of this universe lays out for his disciples

forever.

Are you afraid you're going to miss out on something? Some acts of life because you were giving so much time and money away to gospel ministry and charity?

Jesus says here, take the long view. You don't miss out on anything. You actually just build eternal reward is what you do. The resurrection declares you don't miss out on a single thing in life.

So how is it that we can give so much away and for it to be considered reasonable? First of all, the gospel gives you a new eternal internal wealth.

[ 29 : 52 ] And secondly, because it guarantees you a future external wealth forever. And lastly, we come to the smug guest.

Verse 15. Here we see the sacrifice that was required so that we might in fact have this new internal and eternal external wealth.

Someone at the table says to Jesus in verse 15, blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. And this is one of the social climbing, scrambling guests who's pretty confident that, you know, I'm well connected.

And so, you know, I'll be there. God will reward me because I'm such a good guy. And Jesus responds to this person by telling the, this parable, parable, the great banquet.

He wants him to see how the kingdom of God and salvation actually works. He's telling a story about a man who throws a big banquet. It's a, it quite literally, the language is, it's a mega feast.

[ 31 : 00 ] And I don't think KFC was in mind at that point. It's a mega feast. And the man who, who throws this mega feast is in fact represents God. And the way it works is invitations have gone out.

RSVPs have been received. Everyone's expected to come. And when the time comes, when the feast is ready to happen, it turns out that no one wants to come.

Those who have said they would, they decide not to come. They're all too busy. They're too busy doing deals and getting married. They have other priorities. They have other priorities.

Why don't they come? They've got other things to do. They are the self-righteous, the religious, the successful, the content. They are.

In fact, Jesus is having a bit of a dig here and his historical people are too busy and distracted with life for God himself. The master of the feast then gifts the feast to those who would not normally qualify to be in the room.

[ 32 : 09 ] The ones who would not normally get invited to be in the room. So it's crucial for us to understand here that this is a feast. This is not a potluck dinner. A potluck dinner is where you bring a casserole with 50 other casseroles and that is you contribute something to the table.

Here's my contribution to the feast. A feast is prepared for you. It is provided for you and you enjoy it. And the kingdom of God is provided free of effort.

We simply receive it. And that's why the master says to this servant, you go out there into the country lanes, you go out there in the hedges and you compel them to come in. You compel them to come in.

Because out there in the country lanes and the hedges are the poor, the crippled, the blind. They're the outcasts in society. They're the ones who would not, would even expect to get an invitation.

And the servant has to go out there and he has to convince them to come to the table because they're not going to believe that this feast is on offer for them free of charge.

[ 33 : 21 ] They're not going to believe that eternal life is a gift at all. We earn everything. We pay for everything.

There's no such thing as a free lunch. And to think that we can have eternity in the presence of God forever in perfection as a gift is like incomprehensible.

Jesus wants us to see that this is you and me in the country lanes. And we don't really grasp the gospel of grace. We have to drive it in and drive it in and drive it in.

The logic of God's grace hasn't filled us up with internal wealth and we aren't living with eternal wealth in mind. We need to drive in the truth that we get a seat at this unbelievable banquet because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross.

because he's done the switch. Jesus is the one person who loved God with everything totally and completely.

[ 34 : 36 ] And at the end of his life what he should have heard was God say to him well done my good and faithful servant enter now into the joy of the feast.

That's what he should have heard. Instead we hear Jesus saying from the cross my God, my God why have you forsaken me? Why?

Because he did the switch. He was thrown out as we deserve so that we could be brought in to the feast.

He heard depart from me so that we can hear well done good and faithful servant enter into the joy of your master. You see it's not our humility that earns the banquet.

It's what Jesus has done for us. He was cast out so that we can be brought in. He sacrificed everything so that we could have life and that is the logic and the motivation for us to sacrifice everything so that others would have life.

[ 35 : 49 ] Sacrifice your wealth to ministry so that people will spiritually live forever and charity so that people will physically live now. The more we see that we live by Jesus' sacrifice the more we see that he has made the switch so will we make the switch and this level of sacrificial prioritizing giving will seem reasonable.

Though he was poor sorry, though he was rich he became poor. Though he was an insider he was thrown out. Though he was at the highest place of honor seat at the table he took the lowest place. All so that we could be brought in and put at the place of honor for all of eternity. Because of the gospel of the Lord Jesus because of the gospel of the Lord Jesus when we do that price tag moment and we go is it worth it?

What's it worth? When we do that with him when we do the cost benefit analysis of what it means to follow him sacrificial giving is just plain reasonable.

who's a small to figure out■■ money and if you heal the gospel of the Lord Jesus you capital before he brings it close to the Lord Jesus and the Lord Jesus for another time and we don't matter as to the gospel as to the Lord Jesus and the Lord Jesus and the Lord Jesus