

# with radical generosity

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[ 0 : 00 ] A carnival set up in the concourse down in Chatswood. They had a variety of side shows on display, one of which was a strongman competition.

What that means is they had this 150 kilogram muscle-bound hulk of a bloke who was squeezing oranges into a glass until he couldn't get any more drops of juice out of it and then he'd throw the challenge out there to the crowd that had gathered and amazed at how strong this guy was.

Throw the challenge out. Anyone who can squeeze even one more drop out of the orange, you get \$1,000 in prize money. Many from Crunch Gym tried, but no one succeeded.

Until that is a young Asian lady watching from the back, stepped up to the platform, grabbed the orange, proceeded to squeeze and squeeze this orange until another half a cup of juice came out of the orange.

The crowd roared with delight as the \$1,000 of prize money was handed over. The muscle-bound hulk of a bloke was somewhat embarrassed and flabbergasted.

[ 1 : 12 ] And so he asked her who she was and how on earth did she manage to do that? She said, my name is Wendy Jay. I'm the treasurer of the local Anglican church.

And I do this every Sunday with a collection. It's not a true story.

Just for Jason's sake, wherever he is, where's Jason? It's not a true story, Jason. What I'm speaking about today is practically a taboo subject in our culture.

While we might put up with a money sermon once or maybe twice a year, we expect it's sort of things like on, you know, Commitment Sunday, if we do it much more than that, and I run the risk of being accused of just being interested in people's money.

And yet money is a big deal to God. Jesus talked about money 10 to 20 times more than he talked about sex, and twice as much as he talked about prayer and faith.

[ 2 : 22 ] One third of Jesus' parables were about money, and he sets up money, of all the things he picked on, he set up money as the alternative God, where he said you cannot serve both God and money.

The practical reality is that all too often raising funds for ministry and for mission is like squeezing the orange, trying to get those last drops out and making every little bit stretch as far as we possibly can.

The reason for that is that money is a spiritual issue. It is not a financial issue for the Christian. And so we're finishing 1 Corinthians with the first four verses of the chapter, of chapter 16, where it raises the issue of taking up a collection for the support of other churches.

And we're going to jump around the Bible a bit and look at this issue of radical generosity, how the cross shapes our wallets and our purses. We're going to see how money exercises power over us, which is why we don't give as much as we should.

We're going to see why money exercises power over us and how we break that power that it has over us. 1 Corinthians 16, if you've got your Bibles open there, begins with the familiar now about or now concerning.

[ 3 : 45 ] It's the fifth time that Paul has used this little phrase to address another issue that the Corinthian church had previously written to him about. And so he's bringing clarity to them on this particular issue.

The collecting of money here is the issue that they need clarity on. And it's collecting of money from the missionary churches of the Gentiles that Paul had established and planted for the mother church back in Jerusalem.

The collection started as a support of the mother church during a severe famine, which hit Judea in the first century, and it brought enormous hardship throughout Judea and particularly the capital in

Jerusalem.

And Paul gives very simple advice to this church of Corinth as he did with the other churches that were collecting money for Jerusalem. It's in verse 2. He says, On the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.

And so what he encourages here is regular proportional giving accordance with your income. Over time, though, this church of Corinth stumbled on this issue.

[ 4 : 53 ] They might have had a good start, but they sort of petered out over time. Paul addresses the fact that they were petering out on his instructions here in 1 Corinthians 16 in his second letter, 2 Corinthians, and in chapters 8 and 9.

Paul was concerned not that this church of Corinth would fail in the collection. His concern was that they would fail to excel in the grace of giving, that they would fail to keep giving and go beyond giving.

That was his concern. What we notice as you go through the scriptures is that the Bible revolutionizes our view of money and generosity. In 1 Chronicles, and this is where I want to challenge us tonight in terms of our view of money.

Let's have a biblical perspective of it, on what we have. 1 Chronicles 28 and 29, King David is raising funds for the building of the temple in Jerusalem.

And he prays to God in these words. He says, Everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Wealth and honour come from you. Everything comes from you. And we have only given what comes from your hand.

[ 6 : 14 ] What that's saying there is that everything that you have, everything that we have, is a gift from God. Everything. Now, that might seem a little offensive because we've worked really hard for what we have, but we've worked really hard, or your parents have worked really hard, with abilities, opportunities, circumstances, and health that God has provided.

It's very easy for us in our culture to say, well, I've just worked really hard, and I've been really lucky, and I've made some really wise choices. If you were born in the 5th century, in the jungles of New Guinea, you wouldn't be able to say that.

Everything that you have has been given to you from God. But it's not just that everything comes from God's hand. Here's the next bit.

Everything that comes from God's hand is still owned by God. It's His. God does not give up ownership of something when He gives it to us.

So what that means is that we relate to our money and our resources the way an investment manager relates to the wealth of their clients. And there are plenty of parables in the New Testament that talk about this.

[ 7 : 37 ] If you are an investment manager, you don't operate as if the money is yours and that you can do whatever you want with it. There's an accountability to it as an investment manager.

You have to invest the money in line with the purposes and the desires and the directions and the values of the investor. If you take their money and do something else with it, it's called fraud.

And God is the great creator investor. Everything we have comes from Him. It is His. And we are His investment manager.

And if we deny the investment manager role that we have with God's resources and regard ourselves as the ultimate owner of everything we got, we actually rob God.

That's how strong the language is in Malachi 3 that was just read out to us. Where God is talking about His people's failure to be generous.

[ 8 : 40 ] God poses a question to them. He says, Will a man rob God? And yet you rob me. The word rob here is a very rare word.

It's in fact used only in one other place in the Bible. It is a word that really means to oppress, to pillage, to plunder, to rape. It is a very violent word.

And this is what the people of God are doing to God. And when they hear this, they're shocked. How do we rob you?

How on earth could we be possibly doing that to you, God? What are you talking about, God? And God comes back and says, I'm talking about your lack of generosity with money. I'm talking about the fact that you spend more on yourself.

You have a tendency not to give away. You see, when they keep it for themselves, they are robbing God, plundering, pillaging, raping God's purposes for His world.

[ 9 : 48 ] So instead of building up, it's destroying. And according to these verses, these people in Malachi 3 are oblivious to it.

And that is the power that money has over us. A great deal of the power that money has over us is that it blinds us to the power that it has over us.

Money is different to other things because we are blind to how much it is affecting us. Materialism and greed is a sin that blinds you to its presence. That's why Jesus says in Luke chapter 12, watch out!

Watch out! In the same way that if someone was crossing Fuller's Road right now and they're oblivious, they've got their headphones in, they're wandering along, there's a bus zooming down on them, you'd go, watch out!

Because they haven't seen the bus. And Jesus says, watch out! For all kinds of greed. Is there any place where Jesus says, watch out!

[ 10 : 51 ] For all kinds of sexual immorality. Now it's, well, I can't think of any. It's not because sexual immorality, adultery, all that sort of stuff is any less sinful.

It's because we're blind to greed and materialism in a way that you're not blind to adultery and sexual immorality. You don't go, oh, when you've committed adultery, you're not my wife. You're not my husband. You know they're not. Jesus doesn't say, watch out, you might be committing adultery not knowing it.

Of course you know it. But we sin, this sin of greed and materialism, you're blind to it. And it's interesting that I find after, you know, about 20 years of ministry that no one has ever asked me to preach on money except other ministers who've asked me to come in and do it for them.

No one has ever asked me to help them think through a godly response to their use of their money. I've never heard anyone confess greed and materialism, that is the sin of greed and materialism to me.

[ 12 : 03 ] I've had all sorts of stuff confessed to me over the years. You name it, it's probably happened. Except terrorist or something like that, never done that. But, no one has ever confessed greed and materialism.

No one ever thinks it's their problem. And I would hazard a guess that no one here sitting in this room at the moment probably thinks it's their problem.

They could probably think of someone who is it as their problem, but it's not them. No one ever asked me to pray for them and counsel them because they were ungodly in the use of their money. But if we take the text of the Bible seriously then we should work on the assumption that it's true for us.

This is a blind spot for us in the wealthy West. We're blind too. Now I'm saying it's necessarily true of you. I'm saying that the only way to give any credence to what the Bible says is to always be checking for this blind spot which means you need help.

And fortunately the Bible gives us some help. The Bible does give us at least one guideline by which we can check ourselves to see whether or not money has a hold on us and our understanding of generosity and giving to ministry and charity is anywhere in the ballpark of what God thinks it ought to be.

[ 13 : 23 ] And it's right here in Malachi 3. It's called the tithe. The Old Testament scriptures required that all people give 10% of their annual income to the temple.

And historically this has raised a question for whether this is an obligation for Christians or not. And the word tithe is mentioned only once in the New Testament but it is very significant.

It's in Luke chapter 11 verse 42 and Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and he says this to them woe to you Pharisees. In other words curse upon you Pharisees because you give God a tenth of your mint you ruin all kinds of garden herbs but you neglect justice and the love of God.

You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. That is it's right for you to give a 10%.

But the trouble with the Pharisees is they have this legalistic limitation that they're operating in. They give 10% and view the 90% as theirs.

[ 14 : 31 ] God you got your bit the rest is mine. And so when an issue of justice and love or some other need pops up they go not my problem. They refuse to go beyond the tithe.

They aren't being driven by the grace they aren't being driven by the gospel by love by justice they've been driven by a legalistic code of conduct that pats themselves on the back.

And I don't think that we could ever expect God to say to his New Testament people with greater blessing greater privileges greater hope in the gospel you can give less.

I suspect the reason tithing isn't mentioned a whole lot is because we're not meant to see it as a legalistic limitation to our giving but as a baseline a guideline a rule of thumb a beginning make sure that you're in the ballpark and then like the Lord Jesus go beyond it.

Radical generosity. Money sorry Malachi 3 also gives us a clue as to why money has such power over us. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house.

[ 15 : 48 ] The word house there means God's temple. God's instruction here is for his people to give their gold and silver and their resources and so on and whatever into the storehouse of the temple.

So the word house means temple the word storehouse means treasury it's the treasury of the temple and so what the instruction here is bring your treasure the stuff that I've given you into my treasury and when God says bring the whole tithe to me into my treasury into my temple into the service of my salvation into the worship of me the implication is that if you are not doing that then your treasure is in another treasury it's a matter of who or what you really trust money has a hole in us because we expect it and we trust it to deliver what only God can deliver I'll give you two examples of what I mean firstly if you find it really hard to give money away and I mean you know it's hard you've got to think about so much just not natural just so difficult but it's so incredibly easy to spend money on clothes on cars on travel on renovations on entertainment on takeaway on you know almost effortless piece of cake whip it out spend it go on just like that then those things are your real treasure they are your real treasure oh sorry they are the real treasury of your real temple because what you're really doing no matter what you say you believe is that you're actually looking to those things to get the sense of security desirability acceptability lovability or experiences whatever it might be rather than looking to

God for your satisfaction your contentment your security alternatively there might be those amongst us who look at all these people around us in our consumeristic culture and you puke at that these people spending money on clothes and homes and cars and travel and you just sneer you look down your nose and you think what a waste and you're so proud of the fact that you've been wearing and repairing the same pair of undies for 10 years and that you hang out your tea bags to dry so you can reuse them and you're living in a small apartment and you don't own a mobile phone and you're just really frugal and what you're doing instead is you're putting your money away into banks and investments for a rainy day but you like the spender is still controlled by money you're still under the power of money if you find it very hard to give money away but very easy to save it then your bank is your temple rather than

God you are looking to your bank to give you control that's what it ultimately is about it's about control in a very very chaotic and unpredictable world where only God has control instead of God I've got beauty and acceptance because of these great clothes instead of God I've got control because of these investments instead of God I've got comfort and security because of this great house it is so incredibly easy to give money to whatever is your saviour your lord your hope your happiness your meaning your significance and your security money reveals what we truly worship and that is why Jesus says you can't serve both God and money he sets up money as the alternative God because it promises us security and hope and freedom and a clear conscience and a good health but it will never deliver for us what we think it will deliver for us the biggest saving account in the world cannot stop cancer it cannot stop traffic accidents it cannot stop family disintegration it cannot stop broken hearts

God is the only one who can give you genuine security he's the only one who can give you genuine significance he's the only love that you can never lose and so how do we break this power that money has over us the answer is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Paul puts it like this in 2 Corinthians 8 this is when he's addressing this church at Corinth that failed to really follow through in his instructions here in 1 Corinthians 16 so this is his second letter to them he says see that you also excel in the grace of giving I'm not commanding you but I want to test the sincerity of your love for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich everyone in this room has set their heart on something every one of them every one of us here you've set your heart on something it might be the children your grandchildren it might be a status it might be career it might be physical beauty it might be leisure it might be investments it might be the great

[ 21 : 44 ] Australian dream it might be international travel any list of things that you could set your heart on whatever your heart's treasure is you will do anything for it you will pay any cost for it you will do anything to maintain it sustain it and reclaim it and what this passage here says from 2 Corinthians 8 is that Jesus Christ came and he died for us why would he do that why would he do that I think at least one answer to that question is that you and I are his heart's treasure he has set his heart on you me every other treasure in this world will insist that we die to purchase it that we sacrifice to get it but

Jesus is the only treasure that died to purchase you and that's why we have a mission statement that says that we exist to treasure Jesus above everything in this world now what Paul does here he puts no pressure on your will he doesn't say I'm an apostle you're Christians I started your churches do what I tell you to do and give money doesn't say that he doesn't even put pressure on your emotions he doesn't try to even wind the heart come on guys you're so rich you got all these possessions you got all this money you'd say this and look at these poor orphans over here starving kids with big eyes and your heart goes oh man I've got to hand over 20 bucks to help feed those kids he doesn't play with your emotions he doesn't force your will he just says simply here that if you do not have the freedom to give away your money in eye-popping proportions it's because something other than the

Lord Jesus Christ is your functional Lord and Saviour that's what he says and he says the way to break the hold that money has on your life is to think about the radical generosity of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross until you get freedom to give when we see Jesus dying because he loved the world so much then and only then will we love him when we see that we are his greatest treasure and that he has given everything for us to be the treasure of his heart then he'll become ours the vice of the apostle Paul here is don't sit down with a calculator if you want to break the power of money over your life and grow in generosity sit down with the cross and think about what Jesus did what he has given what he has promised until it wells up in you a freedom a radical generosity to give your money away in eye popping proportions

I read recently the sad reality is that many Christians are in fact not radically generous that is they confess with their mouth that they follow Jesus but they have really little grasp of the impact of the cross they're not actually living the cross shaped life recent survey said that 20% of those who regarded this is evangelical Christians these are people in our camp 20% of those who regarded themselves as mature or very mature Christians let alone the rest of them had never given a single cent to any form of ministry or charity nothing 20% that's astounding it's astounding that anyone would link Christian maturity with a lack of giving that's an oxymoron doesn't exist you can't you cannot be a mature

Christian and not give money it's impossible and also it's said that in the western world the average Christian gave just 2.7% of their income away 2.7% and if the American Christians alone just America forget about us guys just lump their responsibility on them if the American Christians alone actually obeyed this passage and gave 10% of their income every year they'd be able to wipe out world hunger just the American Christians alone our own stats here at St Paul's is that 30% of St Paul's members give over 80% of our budget just 30% give 80% of our budget and for time to build we put it to vote 97% of our church said let's proceed with this building project and the establishment of the international

[ 27 : 40 ] Chinese school but to date around 45% have actually partnered with that project financially we all agree it's a good idea but only 50% of us have actually well less than 50% of us have actually given something to it and so in line with 1 Corinthians 16 and the call throughout this whole series of 1 Corinthians about living the cross shaped life I call you to give according to your ability equal sacrifice unequal giving is the principle what that means is that some of you are better off than others and it turns out that spider man agrees with the bible when he said with great power comes great responsibility that's what the bible says some of you have been gifted many talents not for your sake but but as God's investment manages to use it for his sake for his glory for his kingdom but there might be those amongst us and I suspect in this room here thinking that you know dude

I got just small small little bits coming and going here and there you know my parents feed me pocket money whatever it is and you think a small contribution won't make much difference I want to say that everything that we hope to do here as a church would not happen without the partnership across the board of this whole church it is profoundly unhelpful for us and unhealthy for

