

Wise Investment

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray while we're standing. Gracious God, we ask as we open up your word now, you would pour out your spirit amongst us. We pray that we would understand your word and that you might give us through the power of your spirit the courage to obey it, to live our lives in accordance with it, that we might more and more reflect your glory.

And we ask it for your sake. Amen. Please be seated. I want to begin this morning with the life of one of the greatest philosophical thinkers, one of the sharpest political minds, 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 to be a nobody until his hands wrapped around a barbell for the very first time.

By the age of 18, he was travelling the world, competing in bodybuilding championships. At one point, as he was living in England, his coach, Wag Bennett, asked him, Arnie, what do you want to do with your life?

His response was astounding. 18 years of age. I want to be the greatest and the richest bodybuilder of all time.

[1 : 3 9] 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.

He saw the future, he saw what he wanted, and he just went for it. Just went for it. Jesus told a similar story about a man who saw the future, saw what he needed to do, and he just went for it.

It's that passage that was read out to us. If you'd like to grab your Bibles and open up to Luke 16, it's a passage in the Bible that on the surface seems to be a bit of a problem for us.

Is Jesus actually saying that it's okay to steal from your employer? We know that can't be right. Surely he wouldn't be saying that. So let's have a look and see what Jesus is actually saying in Luke 16.

Fundamentally, it has nothing to do with dodgy deals. It has everything to do in terms of acting now in view of the future. Acting now in view of the future.

[2 : 5 7] So verse 1, Jesus told his disciples there was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, what is this I hear about you?

Give an account of your management because you cannot be manager any longer. The manager said to himself, well, what shall I do now? My master is taking away my job.

I'm not strong enough to dig and I'm ashamed to beg. I know what I'll do. So that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.

You see, the issue in first century Palestine was that there was no unemployment benefits. You had a choice. You begged or you worked. Clearly, this manager wasn't going to get another manager's job after his poor handling of his previous position.

And he says, I'm too ashamed to go right to the other end of the social scale and beg. And frankly, I haven't got the muscles to go and dig holes for a living.

[4 : 03] And so the issue for this manager was, if I'm not going to beg and I'm not going to work, how am I going to eat?

That's the issue. The issue that this man was faced with was a life and death decision. And so in verse 4, he sees what's going to happen in the future and he acts accordingly.

For that short period of time, for this manager, he still has his laptop on the desk, he still has the company checkbook, he still has his name on the plaque at the front of the office, and he can still act now in view of the future.

And he grabs his opportunity. He went for it in verse 5, so he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, how much do you owe my master?

800 gallons of olive oil, he replied. The manager told him, take your bill, sit down quickly and make it 400. Then he asked the second, and how much do you owe? 1,000 bushels of wheat.

[5 : 13] He replied. He told him, take your bill and make it 800. And in the process of acting for the future, he won the favour and obligation of his master's debtors.

He calls in people who owes his boss money, and he substantially cuts the debt, potentially just taking off the top his own commission.

He substantially cuts the bills. and the people are naturally pleased. The really strange thing is those, the master's response, the master says to him, in effect, well done.

Well done. Verse 8, the master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. It's incredible, isn't it? I mean, he's just ripped him off.

And he says, well done. That was really clever what you just did. He didn't commend you for being dishonest. He commended him for shrewdness.

[6 : 18] So this parable is not about being dishonest. It's about being shrewd and especially shrewd in regard to the future. He acted because he knew what the future held.

But it's a really logical choice, isn't it? If you're going to die, you want to make sure you do things so you don't die. It's fairly logical. But as we read in the second half of verse 8, this logical and shrewd action is not a logical and shrewd action that the people of God often make.

Verse 8, for the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. What he's saying there is that the non-Christian knows what they want to do and they live by their philosophy.

They live day by day as if God doesn't exist. But the Christian, well, they muck around with their relationship with God all the time. But the non-Christian, they live by it.

Take, for instance, Philip Adams. He's a journalist, a writer, and an outspoken atheist. Philip Adams believes that when he dies, he faces oblivion, that is, he faces nothingness, and he said this, when I die, that is my lot.

[7 : 39] I don't have any form of afterlife, any form of survival of the ego. To me, the end of life which is rushing towards me with increasing velocity is very real. I once worked out that the average person was born with approximately 600,000 hours to live.

You spend approximately one-third of those asleep, another 20,000 to 50,000 hours sitting on the toilet, and when you eliminate all the wasted hours, there are not many left which are going to be of any use.

So if I have 50,000 to 60,000 good hours left in me, then that's all that I can expect. Therefore, I don't waste time on trivia or irrelevancies anymore.

I want to get it right. That is an atheist speaking who has no hope for the future. How much more the Christian with a certain hope of eternity in the presence of God be wanting to get it right.

But Jesus says that we're not shrewd enough in acting now in view of what is around the corner, and so this parable is a parable that is meant to focus our attention to live each day with the end in mind.

[9 : 07] In World War II, Germany occupied France, but all through 1942 and 1943, the Allies planned a massive counterattack.

General Dwight Eisenhower was selected to command the assault, and so during the night of June the 6th, about 2,700 ships carrying landing craft and 176,000 soldiers crossed the English Channel.

At dawn, battleships opened up on the beaches. They stormed ashore in the largest seaborne invasion in history. By the end of D-Day, all five Allied landing beaches were secure.

Over the next few months, more than one million Allied troops poured into France, and they cleared the Germans out of most of northwestern France.

The German generals knew that they were defeated. They didn't have enough troops or enough fuel to turn back the tide, but Hitler refused to admit defeat.

[10 : 16] By April 1945, Soviet troops had surrounded Berlin, and from his underground bunker, Hitler ordered German soldiers to fight on. But on April 30, Hitler himself committed suicide.

Seven days later, the 7th of May 1945, the new Chief of Staff of the German Armed Forces signed a statement of unconditional surrender to Eisenhower.

World War II in Europe had ended. The Allies declared the 8th of May 1945 as VE Day, Victory in Europe Day.

The decisive day was the 6th of June 1944, D-Day. The final Victory Day, VE Day, was the 8th of May 1945.

Friends, the death and resurrection of Jesus 2,000 years ago was our D-Day. It was the decisive day. That was the day when Jesus dealt with our independence and now we live remembering D-Day.

[11 : 22] We live in the light of D-Day and we are waiting for the final reckoning, waiting for our independence and all the independence of this world to finally be overrun.

We are living through the last days of cosmic war and the outcome is certain. The outcome is certain. D-Day has happened.

The cross of Christ is heralded the final victory. The decisive victory has been won. D-Day has happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus and we wait for VE Day to come.

Every person will stand before his throne and give an account on that day. How should we live therefore? We live each moment as if VE Day was today.

We live each moment as if VE Day was today. That's what it means to be shrewd. That's what it means to be shrewd.

[12 : 32] But the warning of this parable is that too many Christians are not shrewd enough. You can't tell the Christians from the non-Christians in their priorities by the way they use their time and their money and their relationships.

In verse 9, Jesus tells us one way that we can live as if VE Day were right here, right now. I tell you, use your worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves.

So that when it is gone, you'll be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Jesus isn't saying you can buy your way into heaven. We know that for sure from other places, that it's only through him, through his death and resurrection.

What he is saying is use your possessions now in view of the future, in view of eternity. Use everything you have now to please God and not yourself.

What he is saying here is what he has said consistently through the gospels is build up treasure in heaven. Build up treasure in heaven.

[13 : 43] So let me give you a scenario. The sort of thing I think Jesus is talking about here, opening scene. You have \$200 that you've saved up and there is an MP3 player, forgive me if you're from a different generation on this one.

There's an MP3 player that you've had your eye on for a little while, but you hear someone struggling to put themselves through Bible college, you've got your \$200, it's a hard call, you know it, but you give it to them to help them get through Bible college.

Next scene, you're dead. Sorry about fast forwarding your life there. You're dead, you're in heaven, and this guy comes up to you and says, while I was on earth, I used to live in Chile, and you know, one day an extraordinary thing happened.

This guy came up to me in the street and told me about Jesus, thank you, thank you for that, and you think this guy's gone mad.

You've got no idea what he's talking about, what he's saying is that that \$200 that you gave and many others like you allowed that student to get through Bible college.

[15 : 01] That person worked in a church, disciplined young Christians, one or two of those people went into Bible college themselves, and years, generations later, one of their kids went as a missionary to Brazil and evangelized some people in Brazil, and the guy who came up to you in heaven is a grandchild of one of the people who brought Jesus to Brazil, but who ended up working and living and ministering in Chile instead.

If you can follow that, you're better than me. But the point is your \$200 has an enormous impact not just for now and this generation, but for generations to come because you are building treasure in heaven.

When you give to gospel ministry, you are making an investment for generations. You are not balancing the budget of St. Paul's. It's an investment for generations to come, building treasure in heaven for all of eternity, and it may not seem like you get an immediate return because you can't stick ear plugs in your ears and get your mind blown out by music, but the value is priceless.

For all of eternity, you will never regret what you did with that \$200. Never regret it. And that is, if that is the Christian perspective on life, if D-Day is happening, V-E-Day is about to come, and we are to live in the light of V-E-Day, and all of our giving is an internal investment, then why are churches nearly always under resourced?

Why is it the missionaries have to return home through lack of funds? Why do Christian organisations have to waste so much time and energy on fundraisers and fairs and Lamington drives to try and raise money?

[17 : 06] Why? Because we've forgotten the gospel. Because we've forgotten the gospel. we've forgotten that V-E-Day is just around the corner.

We've forgotten Jesus' words builds up treasure in heaven, not on earth. Jesus' words use worldly wealth to gain friends with yourselves, eternal friends who will rejoice with you around that throne for time and eternity.

Jesus sums up the idea in verse 13, no servant can serve two masters, either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve both God and money. Strong words, but very clear words. Jesus didn't say it wasn't a good idea to try and serve two masters.

He actually says here that it is impossible to serve two masters. It is impossible to serve both God and money. your life is focused in one of two directions, God and serving him or serving yourself and what you want in life.

[18 : 18] You cannot do both, is what Jesus says in this passage. So friends, we stand at the edge of something big for us as a church and I want to ask you, what are you going to do?

What are you going to do? You and I are in exactly the same boat as this shrewd manager. The books are still open. We still have a chance to act now in view of eternity.

A chance to make sure that we are not mastered by money, but to give it generously because of the impact of such an investment will be felt for ages, for all of eternity.

It is the greatest legacy that you could leave your generation. It's the greatest legacy that we could leave the generations to follow us at St.

Paul's and the greatest legacy we could leave our children's generations. Investment in people's lives with our time, our prayers, our energy, our encouragement, and from this passage, our money.

[19 : 36] In view of the fact that VE Day is just around the corner, I'm calling you to do what Jesus is calling us to do as his disciples, give it up.

Give it up for the kingdom. Stake everything in this world on the world that is to come. So today we stand on the edge of 11 year ministry plan.

And the bottom line of this plan is a call for us to strongly, single-mindedly, doggedly be focused on the kingdom of God and the coming VE Day when Jesus will return and he will wind up this whole show.

Today I'm calling you to act now in view of eternity. I'm calling the whole church to make wise investments. God calls us to demand our allegiance, he demands our time, our energy, our prayers, our money, our lives.

He helps us see that for all of us we only all have a few good hours left. We all only have a few good hours left.

[20 : 53] people who are going to go to the church. But because this passage is specifically about money primarily, I want to call you to put your money behind the ministry of the gospel in this church and from this church.

We need money to build disciples and to reach the nations. Christians, I was very comforted to discover this week that the good news is that God has given us all the money we need to realise the plans that he has for this church.

The bad news is it's in your pockets. And so our giving to gospel ministry should never be haphazard.

It needs to be planned. It needs to be generous. It needs to be sacrificial. And I want to say a step further, it also needs to be open. Over the last few months I've been preaching from here that money is never a financial issue.

It is a spiritual issue for the church. John Dunn said the same thing when he preached a couple of months ago. It is a spiritual issue for us. And because it's a spiritual issue, it is never to be off limits for the senior minister and the leaders of this church.

[22 : 16] It is never to be off limits. And to that end, you have all received an envelope with information, a card to pledge your giving for next year.

Between now and the 29th of November, which is our commitment Sunday, I want you to be prayerful. I want you to be considerate about your pledge for next year and your one-off donation to the internal and external projects we have.

In the week ahead or weeks ahead, you're going to hear more from me about this, where I'm going to explain my thinking behind it. What I'm calling us to do as a church is something that is not culturally acceptable, even amongst churches, religious, but I believe it's strongly biblical.

In fact, there is more biblical evidence for your giving to be public than there is for it to be private. Your staff and parish council will be setting the pace in a couple of weeks' time when we meet and we pledge our commitment for 2010.

We'll be calling the church to follow our example just over a week later. It's all new for us as a church, but it's also exciting. It's an exciting time for us as the people of God will stop keeping secret what is at the heart of Christian discipleship.

[23 : 45] I look forward to seeing what God will do amongst us in the coming weeks and months and years. I want to remind you that our giving to gospel ministry in this place is not so that we might balance the budget.

It's to realise the vision of the nations coming under the cosmic lordship of Jesus and building treasure in heaven.

So we stand on the edge of a new day for us as St. Pauls and I'm calling everyone here gathered today to give yourself wholeheartedly to a biblical vision, to build up treasure and to act now in view of the certain VE day which is just around the corner.

Amen.