

Hope for All

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[0 : 00] Oh, good. Good morning. It's great being with you again this morning as we close off our mission month here at St. Paul's. We have been looking at raising funds for a variety of ministries, but particularly looking at raising the profile for us as a church to seek to share what God has given to us, but also to seek to shape us as a church of compassion and mercy as we look into the future.

So I'd like to pray before we launch in to this final message and wrapping up this mission month for us. Gracious God, we thank you that you are the God of radical generosity.

We thank you that in the Lord Jesus, you have taken us from spiritual poverty and bankruptcy, and you have overwhelmed us in such a way that we are rich in you beyond all measure, beyond any comparison, we are overwhelmingly wealthy.

We pray that the good news of the gospel will shape our hearts and our lifestyles. And so use this time now in your word to speak to us and to reform our hearts, we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

A little over three years ago now, Australian mining magnate Andrew Forrest gathered the media and politicians together to announce that he will give away \$400 million of his personal fortune.

[1 : 47] It is the largest single donation by a living person in Australian history. Forrest said, and I quote, All of us who have done well have been blessed by good fortune.

And so the generous person, the loving person gives back. Now at the time of making that donation, Andrew Forrest ranked as the sixth wealthiest Australian with a personal fortune of \$6.84 billion.

Today he's apparently worth something in the order of \$10 billion. Forrest then said as part of the announcement, Now that he was in a better financial position, he was able to be generous.

Now that statement, now that he is financially secure, which is probably an understatement in some ways. Now that he is financially secure, he is able to give back to Australians and to be generous.

The assumption is that I can't afford to be generous.

[3 : 14] I can't afford to help is in fact one of the biggest roadblocks that we have to a life of mercy and justice. So can I just encourage you now to get your Bibles, open them up and also go to the St. Paul's app.

And you've got a bit of an outline of where we're going to head in today's message. If you have just tuned into this series, we have been using the Good Samaritan in Luke chapter 10 as our foundational text for mission month.

And the purpose of the parable of the parable of the parable of the parable of the good Samaritan is to answer the question that was posed to Jesus by an expert in the law, Jewish law.

And the question that he posed to Jesus is, who is my neighbor? And we are told that the man was seeking to justify himself.

He wanted Jesus to reduce the command, to make it manageable so that he could love his neighbor in an attainable kind of way.

[4 : 22] Trying to narrow the command so that he could in fact obey the command. And Jesus' answer is clear. There is no limits to mercy.

And in fact, Jesus sets a standard for us in the parable of the good Samaritan that is unattainable. His true goal in the parable of the good Samaritan was to show the law expert and us that he and we are in fact spiritually poor.

We are bankrupt. And he wants to prepare us to seek the spiritual riches that are the mercy of God.

What is the mercy that Jesus is preparing the law expert for and us for? Well, here it is.

All of humanity is like that man beaten on the road in the parable of the good Samaritan. Lying in our own blood, waiting for death.

[5 : 30] We are spiritually bankrupt. We are lost. Unable to help ourselves. And yet God has provided spiritual health and wealth and healing and life in the Lord Jesus.

And the way he did that was he impoverished his own son, the Lord Jesus, on a cross so that all of Jesus' riches and his health and his righteousness and his life could be given to those who put their trust in him.

2 Corinthians chapter 5, 21 in the New Testament reveals this merciful transaction so clearly when it says, God made him, this is talking about Jesus, who had no sin to be sin for us so that we in him might become the righteousness of God.

That we might become wealthy beyond our imagination. So the foundational core element of the Christian faith is that though we are spiritually bankrupt, we have been made rich beyond our comprehension through the mercy of God.

Now one powerful effect that the gospel of grace, the core element of Christianity has on a person is that it creates a life of radical generosity.

[7 : 00] We saw it again in the parable of the good Samaritan. That the aid that the Samaritan rendered to the injured man was expensive. Luke chapter 10 verse 35 says, The next day he took two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, looked after him, he said, And when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense that you may have.

So this man, this Samaritan, obviously ignored his schedule when he showed mercy. Wherever it was that he was heading in that moment, he didn't get there on that particular day.

He also risked his own safety to stop on such a dangerous road to bring aid to an enemy. He also took the man to a hotel where he got cared for him during the course of the night.

And the next day, he paid the owner of the hotel for the room until the guy recovered whenever that was going to be. His mercy in reality to his enemy is open-handed because he says, When I return, I'll reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.

Now in the past number of weeks, we have been looking at this issue in the Bible. And it raises a big question for us.

[8 : 29] One that I want to unpack for the rest of our time today. Is it possible for us to share hope, which is what this whole series is about.

Is it possible to share hope without radically altering our lifestyle? Now over the years, there have been many proponents of Christians adopting what could be called a simple lifestyle.

Possibly the most famous historical model was John Wesley. When Wesley died, his estate consisted of a coat and two silver spoons.

When I've mentioned this to people recently, they go, what did he have two spoons for? I mean, I don't know why he had two spoons. But it's not much. A coat and two silver spoons.

And that was despite the fact that the sale of his sermons and his books meant that in the latter stages of his life, he earned as much as 1400 pounds a year.

[9 : 48] Which is equivalent nowadays of \$331,000 a year in Australian dollars. When his income increased 40-fold over the years, his lifestyle never did.

He was able to maintain the cost of his living to 40 pounds a year all of his life. That's basically \$10,000 a year in today's money.

Wesley once wrote, If I leave behind 10 pounds, you and all of humanity can bear witness against me that I lived and died a thief and a robber.

In a sermon on Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 to 23, and the exhortation for us not to store up our treasures in heaven, sorry, not to store up our treasures on earth, he stated that any Christian who has more than the plain necessities of life lives in open, habitual denial of Christ, and they gain both riches and hell.

So the idea of a simple lifestyle wasn't just confined to Wesley, though. This is not just one guy out there on the periphery. It was very common teaching in the evangelical churches of the 18th and 19th centuries.

[11 : 22] John Newton was another one. The Bible says two things very clearly about our lifestyle. Is Wesley right?

Is the question. Well, let's have a look at what the Bible says about two things. And I'll give you the answers now, and then I'll unpack a bit more. First of all, it says moderate lifestyle.

And secondly, it says be content with your lifestyle. Now, there are no lack of passages which urge Christians to live a moderate lifestyle.

Hebrews 13 verse 5, let me just read that to you. That is, we cannot be happy if we are not free from the love of money and covetedness, which is defined as a continual drive to increase the standard of our living.

Hebrews 13 is not particularly specific in terms of understanding what that sort of standard of living might be. But 1 Timothy 6 verses 6 to 10 is much more specific.

[12 : 45] Let me read it to you. Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

So up there earlier in that passage, talked about food and clothing. Some suggest that food and shelter, instead of food and clothing, is in fact a better translation.

Either way, Paul seems to be saying here that we need a lifestyle that is sufficient enough to preserve our health.

[13 : 50] A lifestyle where we live below our means. Let me just clarify, below our means, not a lifestyle within our means, and certainly not above our means.

Listen, what Paul is saying here is, with that you can be satisfied, you can be content. The word content occurs in both Hebrews 13 and in 1 Timothy 6.

And it's a word that means genuine soul satisfaction. I'm filled up on the inside by Jesus. there is no anxiety there's no gnawing regret or resentment towards people who have what i don't have the difference between the christian and the non-christian is a trust in god for material provision now that doesn't mean that the christian has no motivation for making money or increasing their income there are i think at least two motivations in the bible to do that firstly there is the pursuit of excellence in our work the bible calls us to be skillful to work hard as a way of glorifying god and loving our neighbor making a contribution to shape the good of society hard work often increases income although it's a consequence rather than the motive it's the consequence not the motive proverbs 23 4 says do not wear yourself out to get rich the second motive to increase income is to be fruitful in good works paul was referring to thieves who had become christians when he wrote in ephesians chapter 4 anyone who's been stealing must steal no longer but must work doing something useful with their own hands that they may have something to share with those in need so wealth is to be accumulated strictly for doing good works of mercy and spreading the gospel of the lord the lord jesus christ so matthew 6 makes it clear that wealth is not to be stored up for ourselves and this is my second point what where does wealth fit then wealth and god's calling on our life should we just therefore give all of our money away is substantial wealth if you see of someone who's substantially wealthy uh is that a sign that they are wicked that they lack love and they lack mercy well i don't think the bible supports either of those ideas the bible tells us several things about wealth firstly 1 timothy 6 verse 9 says that those who want to get rich fall into a trap and yet later in the same chapter it says command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth which is so uncertain but to put their hope in god who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment command them to do good to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share in this way they will lay up they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age so that they may take hold of the life which is truly life notice what paul doesn't say there he doesn't say you wealthy stop being wealthy that's not what he says he does however want them to think biblically about their wealth he wants them to have a gospel orientation towards their wealth he tells them that god gives the wealth so the rich person should not become arrogant and that's difficult for us to believe we often consciously or unconsciously subconsciously subconsciously put our hard our wealth down to our hard work and our abilities

the biblical perspective is that every ability that we have every effort every opportunity we have all of our efforts have been provided to us by god himself and they are god's gifts to us and the means by which wealth is accumulated then in verse 18 paul says he tells the rich to use their money so as to be rich in good deeds now this is not mere tokenism this directly echoes what jesus says in luke chapter 12 verse 33 sell your possessions give to the poor provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out a treasure in heaven that will never fail when no thief comes near and no moth destroys and then in matthew 13 22 jesus offers a strong warning the seed falling among the thorn refers to someone who hears the word but the worries of this life the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word making it unfruitful so i think what jesus and paul are both saying here is that disposable wealth not put to use in god's work will threaten the very roots of your spiritual life what we must conclude from both jesus and paul is that while there might be rich christians there should not be rich living christians middle and upper income christians are not required to give away all of their money and their assets but they must invest in good deeds rather than in their own comfort a good steward for the lord knows that wealth if held and managed properly will produce more good deeds over a longer period of time than if it was just given away for good deeds all at once wealth is wrong and it is destructive if we build it up so that we can say the words of luke 19 sorry 12 verse 19 you have plenty of grain laid up for many years take life easy eat drink and be merry god calls such a person a fool notice though that the call to be content and to live a moderate lifestyle is written both to the affluent and those who have little in 1 timothy 6 verses 6 to 8 it instructs the poor not to resent their lack of riches but to be satisfied with their modest economic state and his appeal instructs the rich not to be proud but to voluntarily be satisfied with a more modest standard of living also so how do we get the balance in our lifestyle let's bring some of these principles to bear on our lifestyle firstly first point we need to give we need to be radically generous to give until we feel the burden of the needy ourselves on our lifestyle

the 17th century american pastor and theologian jonathan edwards gave a very vivid illustration of this he says a poor man is walking along with a burden a burden of discomfort and inconvenience when a christian comes along and says i can't afford to help the poor he says when a person comes along and says i can't afford to help the poor they're actually saying if i help you in this moment with your burden i will have to carry some of the burden it will cut into my lifestyle some of the poor man's burden would slide over onto me the helper and i will have to carry it edward responds that's the point that's the point that's what the bible is calling us to live out if our giving to the needy to poor to ministry to compassion means that we do not feel the burden it doesn't cut into our lifestyle at all edward says and i think the apostle paul says and jesus says give more it's possible to give 400 million dollars away and it will don't get me wrong it will do an enormous amount of good but if it hasn't put a dent in your lifestyle in such a way that you feel the burden of the recipients then you can't call it radical generosity you can call it kind but you can't call it radical generosity now this is a biblical principle that has ramifications for all of us edwards would say if he was standing here right now edwards would say that the family that can give away 10% of their income without any dent on their lifestyle he says you've got to give more this is a word to those who suggest that all they need to do is give 10% of their income no more of course bearing in mind that research in the western world indicates that only 5% of Christians actually give 10% or more of their income away and so frankly this word is to potentially 95% of us listening to it right now

[25 : 14] American author and pastor John Piper argues this point very strongly on the back of Edwards' comment he says it is a biblical truth beyond all dispute all of your money is God's Psalm 24 verse 1 and has been loaned to you as a steward to use in ways that maximize the glorification of God's mercy in the world Matthew 25 verses 14 to 30 and it is irrational to think this is Piper still it is irrational to think that giving 10% of that money to church settles the issue of good stewardship in a world of such immense need and in a country of such immense luxury and under the commission of such a powerful Lord the issue of stewardship is not should I tithe but rather how much of God's trust fund dare I surround dare I use to surround myself in comforts that's the issue so that's the first thing we need to give until we feel the burden of the needy second this is the other side of the equation we must not be so unwise in our giving that we and our family become liabilities to others this is one of the most difficult balances to strike

I think on the one hand you hear the likes of Wesley John Wesley John Piper Jonathan Edwards they're all John we hear them to say things like you shouldn't save lots of money and you should be radically generous and on the other hand 1 Timothy 5 verse 8 says anyone who does not provide for their relatives and especially for their own household has denied the faith and is worse than any unbeliever now wisdom tells us that we must not give away our income and all of our possessions in such a way that our children our elderly parents or whoever it is become financial burdens for others to feed to house to clothe in future years now I think we have a tendency to rationalise too much investment into our family rather than in the poor our children are well provided for if they are clothed if they are schooled if they are fed and they have a roof over their head and they have access to medical attention they are well provided for and we teach our children a great lesson when with them as a family we work together to surrender our convenience and our comfort for the sake of the needy so perhaps it's best not to call us into simple living but to call us into justice living a justice lifestyle simple living is a helpful term but it carries the idea that it's an option for me what the

Bible is calling us to is not an abstract exercise in self denial but rather as a means to an end in direct ministry to the needy how then do we determine do we determine how much to give away radical generosity cuts into our lifestyle in such a way that we feel the burden of the needy so this is a calling here for every person and family every church in Christ to live below their means below their means in order to share hope with others so let me point you to four things that we have an opportunity to address right now today by the end of today number one since COVID-19 has hit us our own parish offertory has been down by \$10,000 a month that's the first thing where people were giving we're now pulling back number two we have raised from when

I wrote this early this morning \$10,944 of our targeted \$20,000 towards Lowe's ministry of planting the church in the Gold Coast that is we have so far in the last five weeks got 54% of our target we have raised \$4,376 of our target \$10,000 for Narrabri Drought Appeal that's 43% of that target in the last five weeks and as you would also be aware we now have a St Paul's Hope Fund that is operating and we could do I think with at least \$2,000 in it to be ready to meet needs ready to meet needs as they arise let me just say that we have been in stronger positions than this in previous mission months it is possible that some of us right now are being cautious because of recent announcements of our country being in a recession

I understand that let me just say though if you're sitting here and you're listening to this right now and you're a member of St Paul's if the income is still coming in today is the day to serve the Lord let him worry about tomorrow let him worry about a month and a year's time today is the day to serve him and trust him with the future heed this warning Jesus and the apostles considered money hazardous and helpful it's hazardous and therefore I encourage you to put limits on how much you keep for yourself don't put limits on how much you make but how much you keep secondly it's helpful which means you get and you get this incredible joy of giving more and more and sharing the radical generosity of the

[32 : 43] Lord Jesus Christ to us to others Amen