

A Great Investment

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Date: 21 March 2021

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[0 : 0 0] So the theme today of the sermon is a great investment. And in researching the sermon, I was reading an article about investment specifically for the sermon rather than for any great amount of money that I have to invest, it has to be said.

But it is said there are seven things to look for if you're looking for a return on your investment. You've got to crunch the numbers, you've got to have a solid business plan or you've got to see a solid business plan, a unique idea, a strong narrative, strong story, committed players, clear return and a clear buy-in. So these are seven, the article was suggesting, seven very important things to look for if you're wanting a return for your investment.

And undoubtedly if you're sharp financially and take on board some of these different points, there's lots of money to be made out there if that is what interests you.

But we have something far greater than money to invest. We have the gospel. And that's really what I want us to consider today. If we invest our lives in following Jesus Christ and serving Him, the returns for that are unimaginable.

If you just think of these seven things and apply them to Christ, crunching the numbers, we have inexhaustible riches in Christ. He's got a pretty solid business plan.

[1 : 4 8] And we've been looking at that in the Old Testament as it prepares for the coming of Christ and Revelation speaks about His return. It's a unique idea. There is no idea like it.

It's about the Son of God who comes in the flesh as we've also been looking in the evening worship. It's a compelling story. It's a strong narrative. You've got really committed players at the heart of this gospel message, God Himself committing to us in our folly and in our ignorance to redeem us.

And there's a remarkable clear return for all who put their trust in Him. The shares in Jesus Christ are free. And it's new life and new hope and a new future. And there's a clear invitation to be part of that as we accept the gospel. And that's really our theme for a few moments this evening, this morning.

So the situation in Corinth that is being addressed by Paul here is the gospel challenge that he was putting to the Corinthian church because he's speaking, as Becca read in the first section from chapter eight, he was speaking about the non-Jewish churches, the Gentile churches in Macedonia, who were raising funds for Paul to take back to the Christian church of Jewish believers in Judea and Jerusalem, who had fallen on hard times. There was famine and they were also being persecuted.

And the very poor Macedonian churches, Philippi and the church in Thessalonica and others like it, they had been economically persecuted because of the rebellion against Rome.

[3 : 53] They were a stricken people. And Paul speaks about their extreme poverty. And yet he says they generously gave to support their brothers and sisters who were struggling in Jerusalem and in Judea. And Paul is speaking to the relatively wealthy Corinthian church who had previously given an offering and said, look, you've got to carry forward your promises to give more and look at the example of the Macedonian churches and what they have done and how willing they are. And he speaks of them giving out of their poverty joyfully, compassionately and generously. And he's speaking there about heart characteristics that are reflected in practical implications. And it's really much more, and I want to speak much more than the raw concept of money, which is always a difficult thing to mention and deal with anyway for a preacher. It's a powerful message that's coming across today about the Christian motivation for our lives. And what Paul is clearly saying here is because we are Christians and because of the salvation of Jesus Christ, our motivation is his generosity for us in chapter eight and verse nine, where Becca read earlier, we have these words, and for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich. Now that's immediately much broader, isn't it, than material possessions or wealth. It's speaking about everything about Christ that he gave up in his character, in his being, that he laid aside in order to be a redeemer so that we could share in his riches. Now in life it's one thing to be poor, even materially, but it's another thing to have been rich or to be rich and to give up that wealth voluntarily to become poor. That is an act of incalculable sacrifice. If someone has only ever been poor, or in a sense they don't know any different way of living, they might longingly look at what other people might have. But if someone is overwhelmingly wealthy and they choose to give all of that up, that is a huge sacrifice. If you willingly give up your bed, your warm bed to go and sleep outside, or you choose to reject or not reject but give up the love of your family for solitary confinement, or you have a huge salary to live off and you give that up and become someone who receives income support. If you have sight in your eyes and you give up your eye to someone who's blind so that they can see, it's different, isn't it? When we give up what we have in order to help others who haven't, and that's exactly what Christ has done in his absolute riches and perfection of justice and holiness and love and life and purity and inexhaustible wealth to face the limitations of taking on a human body and the soul wracked by the influences of being in a fallen world, the humiliation of being rejected and ignored, homelessness, darkness, ultimately guilt and death so that we might become rich so that we might know these things. He is the one who gives us life and hope and who makes, who gives us the gift of his riches. That's his risk, his investment. He pays the price for our sins and we receive the returns the moment we trust in him. And that was standing sacrifice and an outstanding exchange that we receive his riches as he took on our poverty of being, of relationship, of moral character and of loss. It's indescribable.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable or inexpressible gift. It's beyond words. I can't... I'm so frustrated that I can't explain it better for us all. And there's an old Scottish phrase, I think I've used it before, church better felt than told. It's better known and experienced in our lives as we commit ourselves to Jesus Christ. I encourage you to do that, to have that thankfulness because it will change the whole perspective of our lives. The more we appreciate his forgiveness and his grace, the more we appreciate investing our lives for him and for his kingdom. So what is it that we invest? We've seen the situation here and the description of Christ and the motivation. What is it we invest? I'm just going to say two things, our heart and our lives. Our heart, Matthew chapter 6 and verse 21 says very perceptively by Jesus Christ, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And therefore Christ knows immediately that the core of everything is our heart. Guard our hearts because everything else flows from it. And we will treasure what our heart treasures and we will invest in what our heart loves. And what we love, we will invest in that cuts to the very core of your soul and of mine. Probably no one else will know it. Sometimes it might be out worked in our lives. But you know what makes you tick. I know what makes me tick. You know, and we know what we value of first importance. Where your treasure is, that is where your heart will be as well. And the question is, is that spiritual for you and for me? Or is it material?

Is it divine? Or is it human relationships that are most important? And there's, we know the importance of human relationships. We know they're God given. But if they consume our hearts, and they become our treasure, they cannot be our Savior. And so the question is, our treasure is revealed in our hearts. So we invest our hearts in the Kingdom of God, and in following Him, giving Him. But also our lives in chapter 8 again that we read earlier, and verse 7, we have these words, Paul commends the Corinthian Church, but as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in all earnestness and in our love for you, see that you excel in this act of grace also. As you excel in everything, and he's speaking about the whole of their lives, that they have invested that in Jesus Christ. And that is what we're being asked to invest also for the sake of the gospel, be Kingdom players for Jesus Christ. It's not about, this is not about speaking about full-time ministry in the church, or missionary service, or about the old the odd act of commitment that we give to Christ. This is about your life, and my life, it's about your gifts, about your work, your employment, your home life, your material resources, yes, and your money as well. It's about everything being brought before the sacrifice, before the altar of

God. And we commit everything that we are and have and give to Him, because He is gifted every bit of it for us. You woke up and you breathed your first breath this morning. That was God's gift, and God's saying, yes, I'm giving you this day as well. So we invest our hearts and we invest our lives. How do we do that? How do we invest them? There's three things here. I'm sure there's many more, but there's three things in this second section of chapter nine from verse six to verse 15.

[12 : 58] How do we invest our hearts and our lives? Generously, voluntarily, and cheerfully. Great principles of how we serve and give and follow Jesus. Generously, first of all, in verse six, in fact, there's actually two different words here used for generously. Some translations keep them both as generous. The ESV here, helpfully, gives different words, which is reflected in the original. The point is this, whoever so sparingly will reap sparingly, whoever so boundifully will reap boundifully, or some versions of generously. And then verse 11, we'll have these words, you'll be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. And these two words have a different kind of emphasis, different focus, really. The first word comes from, that bound to fully, it's used here, comes from the word blessing. And really, it's the idea of giving generously, because we ourselves have been so blessed in what we have received from Christ, so we want to bless others. Christ has been generous, God has been, the Father has been so generous to us, we generously give our lives in return. What an incredible gift we have been given in grace and in eternal life. And daily, materially, in relationship terms, God gives us so much. So we want in return to reflect that generosity and not be sparing, not be meanhearted or mean spirited in what we do and who we are, giving and sharing our lives, our grace and all our material possessions, generously, open-handedly.

That's the whole basis, isn't it, behind the gospel? It's not counting the cost of what we're giving. It's overflowing, profligate, costly, not being miserly or measured in love and in how we use our lives for Christ. And in our attitudes and thinking, it's about other people as well.

Generosity as in blessedness, but also in verse 11, the word for generous there, you've been rich in every way to be generous. The root seems to mean, of that word, seems to be simplicity. In other words, we're giving our lives and we're giving from our resources without mixed motives, sincerely, open-heartedly, with no pretense. We're not doing it to gain praise from others with mixed motives or for recognition or to get a pat on the back or to be accepted by God. It's that beautiful idea of just being, your heart being open and being generous because of what God has done. So there's generosity, there's a willing heart, a voluntary heart. In verse 7, he says, each one should give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, but for God loves a cheerful giver. So there's voluntary and cheerfulness coming that. It's that whole idea of willingly doing this act of giving in our lives. He speaks about it amazingly in these early verses of chapter 8, where he's talking about the church in Macedonia. And he says that they were begging earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints, begging earnestly. Now that is real voluntary giving. They wanted to be part of God's work, part of God's kingdom to help those who had less than them. And that voluntary spirit, not grudging miserly, legalistically, but as we spend our time, as we give of our, maybe time is the most precious thing these days, as we give of our time and our energy, as we set aside time for corporate worship and our financial giveings and the use of our gifts, is it forced? Is it grudgingly done? What are our motives? Is there that simplicity in that reality of blessing? Because if there is that spirit of voluntary generosity, then we will give cheerfully with, as it says, I think, and over in verse 2 of chapter 8 that these churches gave with an abundance of joy, overflowing joy cheerfully. These are great things, aren't they, to have in our lives generosity, voluntary spirit and cheerfulness. And what then briefly is our return? If we ask, what do we invest? We invest our hearts in our lives. How do we invest it?

Generously, voluntarily and cheerfully. What is the return on our investment? Well, just two verses from our readings and one other verse in verse 8 of chapter 9. It says, and God is able, this is the return on our shares, God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. Now, that's an incalculable return. That is an effusive, overflowing return, as we give generously and recognize the glorious gospel that we have. Paul just almost doesn't have the words, it's flowing over like just a fountain, a waterfall of words that in every way, all this and everything, we will have provision. And then also in verse 11 he says, you will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. So it's a virtuous circle upwards. We'll find the more generous we are, the more sacrificial we are, the more willing we are, the more joyful we are, the more we understand God's grace in our lives and the gifts that

He's given us, the greater our generosity and the greater the return as it were. Now, we don't look for these things, it's not like a business plan that we're looking for investment return, but God generously nonetheless gives it to us. So the marvelous principles in these passages, and it's also, we're reminded of it in Romans chapter 8 and verse 32, you know, he who did not, and it's in the theme of Paul is saying here, he did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. Will he not also with him graciously give us all things, everything we need, you know, he's already proven it. He's given us Jesus Christ, he's given us eternal life when we entrust our lives and hearts to him and deal with our sins before him and recognize he's taken them. How will he not give us what we need to serve and follow and reflect his generosity in our lives? So in conclusion, moving from the truths of this passage, just to speak specifically for a minute or two to the people of St. Columbus, if you're watching and don't belong to St. Columbus, that's fine of course, and it's lovely to have you. But I'm just focusing my final words just on our own congregation here, our own community. Can I just encourage you to invest for the best?

[21 : 12] You know, God's grace and God's generosity, God's love, can I say it's not sentimental. God's love is the most powerful force known to mankind. It's mankind's greatest need to find the relationship with God through Christ, which has been lost through sin. It's what this world and these dark days need more than anything. And your generosity as you reflect that love that has transformed your hearts will go a long way. You have this love. You have this gift.

And as we love one another, remember these famous verses from John 13, 34, 35, by this men all, by this will all men know that you're my disciples, if you love one another.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you, is that generosity of love. And that will be a great indication to people that we are His disciples. And that sacrifice of time, open homes, open hearts, sharing lives, financial support, generosity, joyfully given, voluntarily not under compulsion, will be blessed greatly by the living God.

And I believe most importantly, with a, with a, a righteous return of righteousness, there will be this great harvest of righteousness, isn't it? As we multiply verse 10, He will multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

It's not material harvest He's speaking of here. He may be speaking about, in some ways, of material giving, but He's saying it will be a spiritual harvest that we receive. And that is absolutely incredible. Invest for the best. And today accept my thanks, and the thanks of the leaders, and I thank the leaders for their work and for all their support, but accept my thanks on their behalf for all the work that you've done over this, for example, this last year of lockdown, with all the difficulties and struggles and challenges that you have continued to serve the King, you've continued to invest, you've continued to love, you've continued to support, you've gone out of your way to look after one another, and you've shown these gifts, these characteristics of generosity, of a willing spirit and of cheerfulness. Accept my thanks, and rise to the impossible moving forward. It very much seems like that to me, that the way forward is an impossibility for us. The needs are very great.

[24 : 14] Again, by the summer, there'll be lots of changes of personnel in the church and lots of challenges of coming out of lockdown and of meeting together and of re-socializing and reaching out with the gospel. And maybe you think, it's overwhelming the needs, and I can't give any more. Please don't, Derek, don't demand any more of me in St. Columbus, or maybe further than that. I've said, God, don't demand any more of me. I can't keep going. It does seem impossible.

But can I remind you just of our vision as a church, which is to give, as a city center church, committed to Jesus Christ, committed to worship, mission, community, and discipleship, and to plant churches? Can I remind you of that vision? Can I remind you just to be like Jesus, again this year? A very good friend of mine put something on social media this week, or on WhatsApp. You've probably seen this particular comment. This year, it says, I want to be more like Jesus. Hang out with sinners, upset religious folk, tell stories that make people think, choose unpopular friends, be kind, loving, and merciful, take naps on boats.

Sometimes that simplicity of just being like Jesus is what we need to be reminded of, as our vision is to build the community, make disciples, and grow the city group families.

We've got this great training program that Thomas over these last three years has spent so much time developing for leaders and ministers in training. That's going to need continued funding and support.

With the ongoing costs of planting churches, particularly Winchborough, and at a difficult time to do that. We've got the wider commitments. We've got global support.

[26 : 15] And for me, the most exciting thing as we move forward in the next few months, which because it seems very much to me to be a God thing that's happened, is what's happening with Sparkle Sisters.

The great doors that are opening there to the vulnerable, to the abused, to the homeless, to the trafficked. Because that is a vital emphasis of the Christian church to share our lives and our generosity and our love where there is the greatest need. What potential there is in that today, as we practically, and what's our theme for the year that we are not only hearers of the word, but doers also. What powerful effect that could have on a cynical, suspicious, and secular world in which we live that we are reaching out in that dramatic and powerful way to those who we recognize that we want to share what we have with both primarily spiritually, but also materially and relationally. So much more than just financial support. So can I ask you to consider the impossibility by looking at Jesus and by looking at what he's done for you to consider your spiritual investment moving forward, your heart and your life into this gospel community and beyond, and even financially, because it will bring a spiritual harvest, it will not bring necessarily in any way a financial return. I know that. And I do thank you because I know it's been a hard year yet our giveings have been amazing, really amazing. But can I ask you to keep investing?

Can I ask you to give financially to support our work if you're with us regularly and you don't have a standing order? I would love you to think about taking one out, there's details in our website. And if you do have a standing order, as I have one of the disadvantages of that as an act of worship, it's not so visible for us. You know, we have a standing order and sometimes we forget it's there and we cease to pray over it and offer it as an act of worship, although your giveings or monthly offering have been just unbelievable. But maybe it's worth looking at that again, as I need to do, so that we can maybe give more or maybe finance is change, give less. But I would encourage you to do that in that regular act of giving, because there is so much to do, so much more I think we can do. And God is no man's no person's debtor. He, there is this amazing spiritual return of ongoing generosity that we experience when we hold loosely to our gifts, to our talents, to our time, to our love, and we share that with others.

One day I'll share with you how much material resources I'm asking God to give us over this next while. I know He has given us everything. He's given us His Son, and He's given us all that we need. But I hope you will pray, as I pray, for the abundance of resources beyond what we can ask or even imagine to be able to do kingdom work, gospel work, work that will bear a harvest of righteousness. That's all I ask. Amen. Father God, we pray that you would take away the scales sometimes that are on our eyes. I pray that you'd forgive our, sometimes our lack of appreciation for what you've given to us, what we possess and own in Jesus. And I pray especially today for anyone who might be listening to this service online, or maybe we'll listen to it again, the future online, who doesn't know you, who hasn't been touched or sought out, your amazing, generous love, who doesn't appreciate that Jesus died on the cross for them, or who doesn't think it really matters that much, and who think God is miserly tight or not generous. Pray, Lord God, that you would take the scales off their eyes and help them to see that to serve God and to follow

God is to know life and life to the full, and that you would destroy the deceit and the lies of the evil one who whispers a different narrative to us, but it's a narrative of emptiness and darkness and loss and despair, sometimes covered in light, a wolf in sheep's clothing.

[31 : 57] Lord remind us of grace and of goodness. Amen.