

Money or Your Life!

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[0 : 00] Now, like us this morning for a little while to look back at the passage that we read together in Luke's Gospel chapter 16. And you may wonder what on earth this parable and passage is about.

Is there any common ground between money and Jesus Christ? And if so, what is it? Because it seems in a sense to be that they are in two different dimensions really.

Money is just to do with the living and this life. And you might think, well what on earth has Jesus Christ got to do with that? And Christ is part of our spiritual lives as if we can draw a very clear distinction between what happens in the material world and what happens in our spiritual world.

But it's actually interesting. Jesus has a lot to say about money at various stages and places in the Bible. I hope you don't think it's inappropriate to choose this passage today in an ordination service of Eldar and Edikin.

But I hope you'll find that all of scripture comes to the cross. And as a congregation we're looking to, or day and men to lead us in the pastoral work of the ministry and in the diacano work.

[1 : 22] All of which involves all of us and all of our being, money included. But I'm not really going to speak about money. I'm going to speak about Jesus. But Jesus does speak a lot about these practical things and he actually uses a lot of very practical everyday examples to get across spiritual truth.

This passage is sandwiched between two other passages, the parable of the prodigal son, which is all about money.

How he spent and squandered money and looked for money to give him a life of pleasure and a life of happiness and a life of ease. And then it's followed by another parable about the rich man.

And he also had lots of money, which he believed gave him influence and power in his life. And so here we have, in the middle of these parables that are spiritual but nonetheless practical as well, we have this parable of the shrewd manager it's called.

And all of the parables of something in common in that those who are in the parables don't recognise a very important perspective in their lives.

[2 : 37] And that is the riches of Jesus Christ and the value of eternal life and being right with God.

Two words that I want to use to open up these teachings from this passage today. One is foresight and the other is devotion.

Because both of these words are central and are key to this passage and it's teaching. The first parable, the parable of the shrewd manager is all about this guy being shrewd.

That's what it's called, the parable of the shrewd manager. And the word kind of has this underlying meaning of having foresight, of being able to see something and plan for it, being a shrewd person.

And these are ordinary stories and yet they have this spiritual meaning. So in verse 8 we're told that the master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.

[3 : 47] Well what was happening? Can I just say by way of introduction to this parable? It's very provocative, okay? It's a provocative parable. Jesus is giving a good lesson from a bad example.

He's not commending what is done in this parable but he is using it as an example of foresight, of someone who acts in an appropriate manner having found out some important facts.

Because he's a bad bloke really, isn't he? This manager. Because he's been ripping off his rich man who was his boss really.

For a long time and I guess he thought it was just a great way to live. The manager, the rich man probably wasn't that concerned and so he was ripping off. And then eventually it came down to the point where the rich man recognised that.

Verse 1, given a count of your management, because you're not going to be management any longer, he got his P45 was coming here because he was being dishonest and he had been found out, been fleecing this rich man.

[4 : 52] That happens quite a lot, doesn't it, in life? But as he was challenged about that, he recognised and understood that the writing was on the wall for him and that he had better act quickly.

And so we have the accounts of him going to people who owed the master money. He's saying, why do you want to show your thousands? Oh well, just make it 800 and that'll be fine. Because he wanted not only to settle the accounts but he wanted to have friends that he could call on these people.

He wanted to have these people as friends when he was sacked from his job. So he was acting to protect his own future because all of a sudden his perspective had changed because he recognised he was accountable.

He recognised that there was a day of accounting for him and he couldn't carry on fleecing his boss but he had to act on it. Now he did what was dishonest but he did act truly, you have to say, didn't he?

And his rich employer who maybe lived with that kind of philosophy himself commended him for that. And then Jesus goes on to say, well, you know, that's how the people of the world deal with their own kind.

[6 : 05] They do it in a kind of way that is in its own way commendable. And then he goes on to apply it. And we'll do so in a minute. So there's that parable which is quite a provocative parable.

But then there's also another couple of characters, another character in verse 13 who is a servant. And it's a very short kind of verse and it basically is just saying that a servant, and remember Jesus was speaking into a situation where servants and service were quite common. He said a servant can't serve two masters either.

He will hate the one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other. So he's moving on to force from foresight to devotion. And he says that people generally can't have divided loyalties.

In these days of servants, a servant wouldn't be committed to two masters because there would inevitably be tensions. One would be good, one wouldn't be quite so good. You would be attracted more to serve one than you would be to serve the other.

In your heart you will really devote to one and not the other, particularly if there was real differences between these two masters. So he simply is wanting them to think about devotion and about who and what is important in our hearts.

[7 : 31] So that's the two pictures, that's the two parables that we have there very quickly explained. And the key to them, the first is Jesus is speaking about being shrewd, being force-sightful.

And in the second one he's talking about devotion. So let's apply that, let's apply them spiritually to our lives and to our hearts.

We'll take the first parable. This businessman is someone who acts based on changed circumstances, a changed future, recognizes he's accountable and his whole perspective and his whole behaviour changes.

And spiritually we can surely recognize what Jesus is beginning to teach and speak about here. What is our perspective spiritually in life?

Christ isn't afraid to use a bad, worldly example to give a good spiritual lesson. This guy looked forward at the consequences of behaviour and so it wasn't good, so he provided for his future, he acted.

[8 : 49] Now spiritually we also, through God's word and through a recognition of God's word, come to the place where we know and appreciate we are accountable.

We just can't go on living any old way without reference to God or Maker or Redeemer and our judge. And that is part of the point of this story.

And Jesus is saying our life, our gifts, our day to day, our heartbeat, our talents, our intelligence, our resources, our money.

But most importantly our attitude to Jesus Christ are things that we are all accountable to God for. And he wants us to live our lives with this future reckoning in our minds that we are accountable.

And that ultimately, unlike this shrewd manager who wheeled and dealt to get his own way, we are unable so to do. And we fall short of what God demands of us.

[9 : 58] At every level we fall short of his perfection, both outwardly but most importantly inwardly with respect to our hearts and with respect to his preeminence and loving him and serving him and being pure and innocent.

We fall short. And yet we are accountable. You are accountable. I am accountable. We are not here for a very long time, far from it. We will stand before God on that great day because he is the judge.

He is the Creator. He is the Lord. He is the sovereign. And we are accountable people to God. And Jesus is encouraging us to act on that fact.

To prepare for that day. To be ready to meet with God. How can we do it? We can't do it in the same way as it is shown in this parable where a guy can, he padded his own nest.

He looked to do his own thing to provide for his future by making friends and by hoping that they would invite him into their house when he was made redundant, when he was sacked.

[11 : 12] We also need to be ready for that day. And the Bible makes clear that God loves us and has provided a way for us to deal with our accountability and our fallen short.

And it's not by going to church. And it's not by giving to charity. And it's not by doing things the best way we can. However, good that might be in relation to others. It's by recognising Jesus Christ as the way forward through his death on the cross where he dies in our place.

So it's the gift of salvation. Isn't it nice that there's a direct kind of irony in this whole parable where this shrewd manager, this guy in the world, just uses his own wheeling and dealing to try and...

make a future for himself. But we are given a gift. We don't need to wheel and deal with God or bargain with Him. We're simply asked to accept salvation. It's simple and it's clear. And we need to be ready for that day of accountability by being covered in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

That's the gospel message. That's the core of what we believe, what we worship and why we live as a people. That Christ is the core of our community. So that even when we're talking and say about money as we are here, it comes back to Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is using, as it were, money, which is a very everyday example, to speak about his own spiritual riches.

[12 : 52] And the inheritance that we have in him. We need to be ready. And in so doing, I think, in coming to Christ, and we've come to the point where we recognize that and we're Christians ourselves, then our attitude to everything in life changes. Because Christ has redeemed us, Christ has brought us back, Christ has given us newness, Christ has changed our perspective.

So our attitude, even to 10 pound notes to money, changes. Our whole attitude to wealth, creation and money and what it means and what it can do, changes because of Christ.

We recognize, maybe for the first time, and I hope we do recognize that, that it is a good gift from God. John James 1.17 says, every good and perfect gift is from above.

And that includes money. Let's not demonize it. Jesus in the Bible doesn't say money is the root of all evil. Jesus says that the love of money is the root of all evil, of many kinds of evil. And again, he's pointing to our hearts. But we recognize it as a gift.

We wouldn't do so well without money, would we? We wouldn't do so well on a day-to-day basis without what God has gifted to us. And it's a blessing.

[14 : 16] And we can do so much good with it, can't we? And we can enjoy so many things with it as well in our lives, can't we? And when we don't have it, we recognize how dependent we are on what God can give and how dependent we might be on other Christians.

And on their generosity and goodness. And it makes us maybe more thankful when we don't have as much as maybe we think we ought to. We thank God and see it as a gift, don't we? I hope we do. But we also see it as a spiritual investment. A practical thing like money as a spiritual investment.

Verse 9 is quite a difficult verse. You may have read that and thought, what's that about? I tell you, Jesus says, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

What is Jesus saying there? Is he saying that we need to use our money to influence God to accept us in heaven? Is he saying that if we use our money in a certain way, we'll get accepted into heaven?

I might look like that at the first kind of reading, but clearly that isn't the case because that clearly goes against all of the rest of teaching of Scripture.

[15 : 43] But he is not talking about buying our place in heaven or buying our favor with God. But he is saying that we should use the money that God gifts us with spiritual eyes.

We should seek to use it for God's glory, even in practical ways, but also spiritually. Use it for the furtherance of His kingdom, for the spread of Gospel work, for the good of our fellow Christians, so that when we die and our money doesn't go with us, we will maybe meet people in heaven who will have benefited from our prayerful and spiritual use of the financial things God has given to us.

Showing compassion to the needy, encouraging justice, prayerfully offering what we have been given and sacrificially giving it for the cause of Jesus Christ on a week to week basis in the church collection.

On a day to day basis when we see Christians in need, on a month to month basis when we look at the troubles and the problems and the poverty and the need in the world around us, that we use that and we see that, so that when we come to the day of reckoning and are ushered into heaven because of what Jesus has done for us, there will be those who will be there before us who have benefited from our spiritual use of the resources God has given to us.

This is a spiritual investment, but also I think as an opportunity to make clear the change that is in our hearts. Because again in verse 11 and 12 Jesus says, so if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

[17 : 26] If you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? Again Jesus pointed to the fact that if our hearts have been renewed and changed by him, then that affects the pennies and the pounds as well as the thousands and the millions.

It affects how honest we are in the very simple things. It is an old proverb really isn't it? If we are faithful and little then we will be able to be faithful and much. If we are honest as Christians with the small little private things, with our personal morality, with how we are honest with very little, then we will be given much spiritual responsibility.

If we act as Christians in a dishonest way, but no one sees that, I don't need to do anything honest because it is a Monday or a Tuesday. I will be honest and holy on a Sunday, but on a Monday and a Tuesday and a Friday I will do my own thing.

If we act with that hypocrisy or that duplicity, then God says we can't be used in the Kingdom work because we don't recognise his lordship over the very small things.

The very honest things that we must be and do as people. It is an opportunity. Our use and our honesty and our ability to be faithful in small things, handling worldly wealth for example, will reflect our ability to deal with spiritual treasures and responsible for them.

[19 : 01] And I think there is a corollary, a parallel is there not, seeing how we use our money spiritually in a generous and sacrificial way and how we share the riches of the Gospel in a generous and outgoing way.

If we hoard all our money to ourselves, we want to keep it because it is very important to us and probably we will keep Jesus to ourselves as well because we just wouldn't have learned that generous and sacrificial giving of him to others and willingness to sow in order to harvest a spiritual harvest in his name.

So we recognise that there is foresight and spiritual foresight that brings our everyday life into the spiritual lordship of God.

But can I just finish by asking a question about our own hearts because I think that is what Jesus goes on to speak about in terms of our devotion because he uses that picture of the servants, does not he? Not being able to serve two masters.

And he says he can't serve both God and money. A slight dig towards the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees who were told loved money and all that gave them and they sneered at Jesus.

[20 : 35] You know, what is in our hearts is at the very core of what is our life about and our understanding. What is it therefore we ask the question this morning is in our hearts?

Very blunt and I make no apology for doing so because I must ask the question of myself. What is in our hearts? Is it money and all it can buy? I don't mean to say that we need to be kind of mad on money and the pursuit of it, but all that it represents for us as well, a life of security here and now, of opulence, of power, independence, possessions, luxury, pleasure, all of these things that money in a sense are just a channel towards fulfilling the desires of our hearts.

Maybe it's not a per se money itself, but it's all it can give us. Money and all it can buy is that at the root of our heart? Is that what drives us? Is that what motivates us? Is that what we're hanging on to? Is that what we're keeping close to in our lives with God?

Kind of like a passing thought, now and again, every so often. Money and all it can buy, or is it Christ and all he can give? There is such a vast difference. Money and all it can buy are Christ and all he can give.

The Bible speaks about the gospel as being the unsearchable riches of Christ, unfathomably deep, forever resourced, and they can be ours as we live for and serve Christ.

[22 : 30] His great love for us, his love for us that will not just go till midlife or not till just before we die or not till just after we die, but forever we will be held in the cusp of his love and of his grace, covered by his goodness and forgiven in our hearts for maybe all this selfishness and the greed that the pursuit of materialism has driven us to be like.

Knowing his guidance in our day to day living and thinking, knowing his perspective, knowing his security, his joy, his friendship, these are great words in a very unstable day and generation where people have plowed all their resources and all their hopes and all their longings into material things.

As we place Christ in our hearts and love him and accept his salvation through the cross and then place money in its rightful place as a servant, not as a master, it's a great servant money, but it's a miserable master.

It's a loveless master, skin deep, master that's fickle, it will leave you alone, it will not resource you for eternity at any level whatsoever.

It is at best a temporary friend who will caress you but will not give you what you need in your heart and will not give me what I need and will leave you utterly exposed on the day of judgment if it has been and all that can give you the source of your life and the core of your heart.

[24 : 39] So you can't serve both God and money and in many ways that's a very clear statement isn't it? And in the light of Scripture and in the light of our experience and in the light of what Jesus says, it really should be a no-brainer shouldn't it?

Absolutely no-brainer that it is Christ every time for what he has done and what he can and will do, but we do know while it should be a no-brainer it is often for us a battle to give Christ lordship in our hearts because our sinful hearts love the independence that money represents and can bring.

It is not without weight that Jesus says it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven because it does give us that sense of independence and self-worth and self-reliance.

God's grace requires a humility that clutching onto the greenback sometimes makes us very difficult to recognise and accept.

I love that quote from Christianity Explored, I can't remember which particular week it comes in but where Riko Tice who has devised it has given us a statement that we are more sinful than we ever realised and yet more loved than we have ever dreamed.

[26 : 16] I think that comes into that challenge that we face recognising the duplicity and the adulterous nature of our hearts and yet if we can recognise that and commit ourselves to Christ who will redeem and buy back and forgive and change our perspective because we recognise we are more loved than we can ever have dreamed of.

That is the hope of the gospel and that is our hope continually as we live as Christians and as we preach the gospel and as we share that gospel that even how we use our material possessions that we would use them to God's glory.

So may we pray that we do that. Let's bow our heads and pray that we will do so. Lord God we ask and pray for your blessing on us as we have looked at this subject that you have included in your word.

Sometimes we are maybe uncomfortable with the practicality of the word and of Jesus Himself. We would like very often kind of vague spiritual messages of comfort and gentle and unchallenging spiritual verses and words and yet we rejoice that the passion of the Christ can be drawn into every aspect of our lives and can be a reflection of our unborn spirit.

So help us we pray to know that and experience that in our lives and may we use the gifts that you give us including money and may we thank you for what we have.

[28 : 09] We have so much in comparison with so many but may we not be possessive and indolent with it and indulgent with it but may we see it as your gift, temporary gift.

That we are to use spiritually for the benefit of the Kingdom of God and the needs that are around us.

May we be living examples of Christ and His compassion in the way we use it. Lord bless us and continue with us. We thank you for the privilege of being able to sing together.

We thank you Lord God for the privilege now of ordination and that it is just part of our ongoing work in this congregation which changes and people come and go so much.

It is great to be able to ordain more and eyes into the eldership and the work of the deacons and we pray that your blessing would be on us for that as we go through the formalities of what is involved and welcome them into the life and work and leadership of the congregation.

[29 : 41] Continue with us then we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I would like us to pray together for Peter and Martin and we will do so. We will stand as we pray.

Gracious God we give thanks for this day and we give thanks for your goodness to us and we give thanks for the solemnity of the moment as well as the joy of this moment as we link as it were with the church through the centuries.

And as we remind ourselves of the fact that the kingdom of God has been progressing for a long time through your church in Scotland and through many churches in Scotland.

And we give thanks for the leadership of the church in our own congregation in our denomination and throughout the city and throughout our land today, people who are set aside by God with the relevant gifts and qualifications to minister, to pastor, to lead, to envision, to example Jesus Christ as servant leaders.

Forgive us when that hasn't been the case. Forgive us when the church has been proud and ignorant and arrogant and power crazy. When it has abused its position and when it has done things that would shame the name of Jesus. Forgive us as individuals if that has been the case in our lives.

[31 : 18] Grant us redemption and freedom and unice and grace today in a fresh experience and in a deep reality. And we give thanks for Peter today and for his family, remember them. And we thank you for all that they mean to us in the congregation.

We pray your blessing on him as we set him apart to this work of spiritual leadership in the congregation. Bless him we ask and pray. Give him a sense of privilege and of servanthood and seeing his task and his responsibility as from Christ and for Christ and to Christ.

And we thank you for Martin and ask you to bless him and Kathleen. We thank you for them and for their involvement and work among us in the congregation.

Bless him as he joins the Deacons Court. And as we have been thinking on this whole issue of material possessions and wealth and how we use it, maybe as a court.

And me, Martin, be part of that. Help us to use the resources that we are given spiritually, prayerfully, passionately, with vision for your glory.

[32 : 34] That we would see that you are no man's debtor, that we would use all that we've been given with an abandonment that is Christ-centered and that is willing to trust in him.

Yet in a responsible and God-like way. So Lord bless them both. We set them apart for their roles. We thank you for all the other elders and Deacons in the congregation.

And we remember those that we owe so much of a debt to who are no longer with us but who rejoice in heaven today.

Lord God, we ask and pray that you would bless us and that as mantles get passed on, that Christ would remain central to all we are and all that we do.

And that we would all as people look to Jesus. So bless as we pray in his precious name. Amen.

[33 : 47] Please be seated and you'll give your fellow elders the right hand of fellowship. We welcome you into the work of the congregation and we pray God will richly bless you all. You've got to shake these guys' hands as well.

Come on, come on over. Don't be shy. Now I'm going to ask you to stay standing just for another minute, okay? Because I'm going to read a very short passage and leave you with the words of it.

It's from Acts chapter 20 and verse 28. Paul is saying farewell to the Ephesian elders and he says, Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples from them.

Be on your guard. Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

[35 : 04] So they seem to me to be great words with which to finish our service after or followed by a Psalm today. That you would, in terms of my advice to you, that you would keep watch over yourselves as you serve.

Remember that, that that's the most important reality we face as leaders is that we keep watch over ourselves. We are spiritually close to Christ because we are dependent.

We are under shepherds and we are responsible to Jesus. Keep watch and he goes on to say, be on your guard. Be alert, be aware. We're only here a short time and he wants us to be aware.

And may also you know that we have committed you to God and to the word of his grace. We are committed to you and we commit you and have done in prayer today and will continue to do so.

To commit you to God. We love you with all our hearts and we have a great Savior, a great God and we have a great inheritance. It's lovely to be able to speak and read about an inheritance today after all the emphasis that we've had on money and our use of that.

[36 : 16] We have an inheritance of grace to protect and to share and by God's grace we have committed you to God as you seek to fulfill that role. And as you join with us in teamwork and partnership and with the whole congregation in so doing.

May God bless you richly both in that responsibility. Please feel free to sit down.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever. And all God's people say Amen.