**St Martins C3 – July 16, 2023**

**Generous Living – Be a wise steward.**

**Sermon Summary:**

How we approach our finances matters to God. He expects us to develop a healthy attitude towards money and to use it wisely.

Jesus uses several examples and tells several parables about how foolish a worldly approach to money is. One of those parables is found in Luke 12:12-21, where a guy suddenly becomes wealthy and makes bad choices as to what he does with his wealth. Jesus uses the parable to highlight that we won’t make good choices regarding our finances, until our hearts are in the right place with God.

As we explored last week, when we surrender our finances to God and put His Kingdom first, several things will happen in our lives:

* We will be free from the love of money.
* We will be more aware of the needs in other people’s lives.
* We will see God meet our needs.
* We will be more content with what we have.

**God not only expects us to surrender our love for money, He also expects us to be wise stewards of it.** Jesus uses several different parables to make this point. The parable of the talents, minas, landowner, and shrewd manager, to name a few. (In the devotional notes, we explore some of these parables in more detail) In all these parables, there are servants who have money to look after, or invest. The master will hold them accountable for how they manage the money. Which will then say a lot about the servant’s character.

1. **A wise steward is prayerful**

In all the parables, the servant was commended for doing what his master would have done with the money. In our context, that means, we need to be seeking God as to what to do with what He has blessed us with. This ought to be a continual practice, not just something we do once and forget about. So, the question is: Are we continually praying to God and asking Him to lead us as to what we do with the money He has given us to steward? If we are in need of wisdom in regard to money, we should pray to God for that wisdom. (James 1:5)

1. **A wise steward is resourceful.**

In the parables we are considering, God commends those who invest money to make more money, so that more can be achieved. It is important to note though, that the overall purpose is to build treasures in Heaven. There are many times where money needs to be invested wisely so that more can be achieved. So, let’s be resourceful and wise in our managing of our money.

1. **A wise steward values relationships, not just money.**

In all the parables regarding money, the relationship between the master and the servant mattered. Usually, other relationships as well. We should never let money take priority over our relationship with God. Rather, we ought to use money to help those around us, especially those in need. Isolating ourselves with money is a bad idea. Therefore, seek out wisdom from others who are good with money and partner with them in extending God’s Kingdom.

***Are you being prayerful, resourceful and relational with the money that God has entrusted to you?***

**Suggested questions for Connect Group discussion:**

*Why does Jesus stress the importance of getting our heart attitude right first, in regard to money?*

*In the parables about money what are some foolish decisions that people make?*

*In the parables about money what are some good decisions that people make?*

*What could continually seeking God for guidance with our finances look like?*

*What could being resourceful either with our personal or church finances look like?*

*Who has God placed around your life that could give you good Godly advice in regard to stewarding the money God has entrusted you with?*

*How can we best partner together in using money to extend God’s Kingdom?*

Songs we sang on Sunday July 16:

Your great mercy. Burning with your love. What other King. Yet not I but through Christ in me. Living hope

**Monday’s Devotion – Wise and merciful**

**Read: Luke 16**

This week we are going to explore Jesus’ parables about money. These two in Luke 16 are tricky to interpret. In the first parable, Jesus seems to be endorsing unethical behaviour, but all is not what it seems. Jesus is not saying that the shrewd manager was Godly in his approach, but rather that he was very worldly wise. Jesus is giving us an example of how people in the world look out for themselves in a way that God’s people often neglect to do. Sure, we are not to be unethical in the way we go about it, but we need to look after ourselves and the relationships around our lives. Of course there is the danger of hoarding money, which we ought not do. But, neither should we be naïve in our handling of money. Actually, the people of God ought to be wiser than the world when it comes to using money.

The second parable about the rich man and Lazarus seems to imply that salvation is solely dependent on whether we look after the poor or not. Again this is not the case; however, Jesus uses the dramatic contrast of Heaven and Hell to make a point. Heaven and Hell will be determined by our response to Christ, but with that change of heart, ought to come a change in our approach to those in need around us. How can we indulge ourselves while we see others suffer? The rich man’s actions, proved that his heart was not right before God. Therefore, let us not be like him, but rather be merciful to those in need around us.

*What would being wise as well as merciful with your money look like for you?*

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Who do we help?**

**Read: Luke 10:30-37**

The parable of the good Samaritan maybe old and maybe familiar to us, but it is also very relevant to us today. The context of the parable is Jesus being questioned as to who is our neighbour? Or, to put it another way, who are we expected to help with the money that God has blessed us with?

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a notoriously dangerous stretch of road. It was steep and rocky, with many places for attackers to hide. Travelling alone on it was dangerous and helping others along the way could be dangerous as well. The reluctance of the first two to help might be understandable. They didn’t want more trouble. Would we help a victim of a ram raid late at night in our context? It is a tricky balance considering our personal safety and the needs of those who need help. The first point Jesus is making here, is we should not be quick to walk away.

Another important point is that we make sure that our religious thinking doesn’t get in the way of obvious mercy. Our neighbour is the one in need, whoever they are, or wherever they are from. Yes, we are to help those in our immediate family and in the body of Christ first, but that doesn’t mean we have an excuse to not show mercy, when it is obvious that we ought to.

*Who is your neighbour in need?*

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Simple acts of kindness**

**Matthew 25:37-40**

*“Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ “And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’”*

This is an exert from the parable about the sheep (the righteous) and the goats (those who were religious but unmerciful). There are a couple of really important points about the use of money in this parable:

Firstly, God is watching closely whether we are using what we have been given to help the needy. It would be taking it too far to suggest that our entry into Heaven is dependent on us responding to every need for mercy; however, Jesus is making the point that God is watching whether our observation of needs around us flow through into practical action.

Secondly, Jesus is making the point here, that it doesn’t have to be a big thing. Small acts of kindness matter to those in need and matter to God. He sees every kind word and kind action that we do. Even if we can’t do a lot, we can do something.

*Are we aware of the needs that are around us and are there things (even small things) we can do to meet them?*

**Thursday’s Devotion – Just do something**

**Matthew 25:25-27**

***‘****I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.’**“But the master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn’t plant and gathered crops I didn’t cultivate, why didn’t you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’*

It seems that Jesus told this parable a few times using slightly different measures. Some were talents, others gold. However, the flow of the parable and the points are the same. We will explore these today and tomorrow.

The third servant is the one who does nothing useful with the money. He simply hides it. Maybe the equivalent for us would be sticking it under the mattress. At first glance, this doesn’t seem that bad, but it is. In the other accounts, it refers to this servant as wicked and lazy. There is a harsh judgement from the master. That ought to be sobering for us to ponder on. Out of fear or out of laziness, are we doing nothing with what God has given us?

It seems that the judgement wouldn’t have been as harsh, if the servant had at least done something with the money. Likewise, we may not have much, or we may not know exactly what to do, but that is no excuse. We need to at least try. We need to take what we have and invest it in some way where we will see what we have invested multiply.

*What has God given you to work with?*

**Friday’s Devotion – Rewards for the righteous**

**Matthew 25:21**

*“The master was full of praise. ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!”*

The main point of this series on Generous Living is that we have been blessed to be a blessing. When we approach our finances in a Godly way, God will be pleased, He will meet our needs and His Kingdom will grow through others being blessed.

When God can trust us with resources He sends our way, God will give us even more to bless others with. This is where prosperity teaching is partly right. God does entrust those who have been faithful with money, with more money. However, this is not for the purpose of blessing the person stewarding the money, it is so they can do more for God and His Kingdom purposes. Therefore, we should commend those who wisely steward resources to grow missions and churches etc. Often work like this is done in the background, but it is not going unnoticed by the Master.

So, let us be like the faithful steward and be wise with what God has entrusted us with. Let us not be seeking the reward for ourselves, but rather be willing to do even more for the Master if He asks that of us.

*How has God grown your capacity to bless others over the years?*