

Many of you have prided yourself on being good business people at some point in your life.

Suppose someone reputable made you the following offer: You go into business with me. It will be expensive, but I guarantee it will be worth it. You find all the cash you can find. Take out an equity loan on your house, cash in the value of your life insurance policy, pay the penalty, and take the money out of your IRA account, however you can come up with cash, do it. Then, if you work hard, and follow the company manual, sacrifice and give your very best, I promise you will get back 100 times whatever you invested. If you raise \$10,000, you will get back 1 million. If you raise \$100,000, you will get back 10 million. **Is there anybody in this room who would turn his or her back on that kind of opportunity?**

Listen carefully to the words of Jesus in our lesson from Mark's Gospel: "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time..."

That's quite a promise. **Whatever you invest will be returned a hundredfold.** Nobody could make such a promise except Christ. **And he did it in a most interesting context.**

A wealthy young man came to him seeking the way to eternal life. "Keep the commandments," Jesus said. "I have," said the young man, "since my youth." Jesus loved him. "You lack one thing," Jesus said, "Go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...." The young man turned away sadly. Jesus said to his disciples, "Children...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

The disciples were astonished at the harshness of this teaching. Jesus reassured them. **"All things are possible with God."** Peter then said to him, **"Lo, we have left everything and followed you."** And they had. **It was at this point that Jesus made his hundredfold promise.**

THIS WAS A DEAL OF A LIFE TIME!! But the rich young ruler turned it down. Why do you suppose he did that?

PERHAPS THE RICH YOUNG RULER COULD ONLY SEE WHAT HE WAS GIVING UP, NOT WHAT HE WOULD BE GAINING.

He was used to fine clothes. His cupboard was stocked with fine wines. His home was richly decorated. He was accustomed to the best of everything. In short, he was a first century Yuppie. He would feel right at home among young urban professionals all over our land today.

According to nationwide studies, the number one goal of 53 percent of college graduates in **1980** was **"being very well off financially."** A decade later, that number jumped to 93 percent. In **1980**, 65 percent of college graduates were concerned about a philosophy of life—having a direction to go. By 1989 that need dropped to 43 percent.

AND TODAY—WHERE ARE WE AT?? College students are struggling with their finances due to: *student loan payments, high rent, lack of financial understanding due to parents who taught them nothing about it.*

If these studies are correct, we have produced a nation of young money-grubbers. That's not good. According to Jesus the love of money is the root of all evil! **If you are among the 93 percent who value financial success above all else, your chances of entering the kingdom of God are equal to that of an eight-foot-tall creature with a hump on his back squeezing through the eye of a needle.** Those are slim odds indeed! Why? Because forced to decide between Jesus and your wealth, you will only see what you are giving up, not what you will be gaining.

Consider the opportunities this young man had. He could have made a difference in the world. He could have inscribed his name beside that of Simon Peter and St. Paul. He could have been the Albert Schweitzer or the Mother Teresa of his day. He could have spread circles of influence that would still be rippling to this day but he turned away.

Robert Schuller once asked Coretta Scott King where she got the dream that kept her going. Mrs. King responded, **"It was while I was attending Antioch College...I heard (a) quotation that deeply motivated me. Horace Mann said to his first graduating class at Antioch in the late 1850s, 'Be ashamed to die until you've won some victory for humanity.'"**

The rich young ruler could have won a victory for humanity. He could have made a difference with his life. Even more significantly, he could have known what it was to walk with Jesus. Many people will give their lives to walk with kings. *The rich young ruler had the opportunity to walk with the King of Kings, but all he could see was what he was losing, not what he would be gaining.*

IN THE SECOND PLACE, HE OVERESTIMATED THE VALUE OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS.

Please understand. We are not deluding ourselves about the value of money in a society like ours. As Woody Allen says, **"Having money is good, if only for financial reasons."**

A third-grade teacher asked her class to solve a math problem: "Suppose you had \$.99. Your friend had \$99; what would be the difference?" One little girl replied, **"The dismal point."** She's right. **Poverty is a dismal condition.**

"Having money is better," says Sophie Tucker. Still, money is only one element in a good life. If it becomes an end in itself, then life gets out of kilter. As someone has wisely said, **"Money is a great servant, but a terrible master."**

The ancient Greeks understood this. According to one of their myths, the god Dionysus offered King Midas whatever his heart desired. Without hesitation, King Midas exclaimed, **"I wish that everything I touch be turned into gold!"** And so, it was.

Midas was overjoyed. He drew up a handful of sand and it turned into gold dust. He picked up a stone and it turned into gold. He touched a leaf and it was gold. **"Ah, I will become the richest man in the world, the happiest man in the world."**

He danced all the way back to his home and announced to his servants, "Prepare a banquet. We will celebrate my good fortune." But as the bread touched his tongue it turned into gold and as the wine touched his lips it turned into gold. The king became more dismayed the hungrier he got. And as he reached out to his beautiful daughter for solace, she, alas, too was turned into gold. **And Midas cursed his gift and himself for his foolishness.**

Andrew Carnegie was one of the richest men who ever lived. He was also very generous. Perhaps he explained his generosity when he said, **"Millionaires seldom smile."** We are told, by the way, that Carnegie practically became allergic to money as he grew richer and older. He was offended, he said, just by the sight and touch of money, and never carried any. Because he had no money with him with which to pay the fare, Carnegie was once put off a London tram.

Did money solve the problems of Howard Hughes or Aristotle Onassis? They died two of the world's most miserable men. Why invest your life in something that will only rot or rust? Why invest in something that will someday be left behind? Why invest in something that cannot of its own self bring you peace of mind?

Study after study has shown that money is not the key to happiness. Your marriage is a better investment than your bank account. So are your children, your friends, and your health.

There is one investment, however, that pays bigger dividends than all the rest put together.

THE FINAL ERROR OF THE RICH YOUNG RULER WAS THAT HE COULD NOT SEE THAT THE ONLY RICH THAT COUNTS IS RICH TOWARD GOD.

An old mountaineer was on his deathbed. He called to his wife. **"MARY,"** he said, **"go to the fireplace and take out that loose stone under the mantle."** She did as instructed and behind that loose stone she found a shoe box crammed full of cash. **"That's all the money I've saved through the years,"** said the mountaineer. **"When I go, I'm goin' to**

*take it with me. I want you to take that there box up to the attic and set it by the window. I'll get it as I go by on my way to heaven." **His wife followed his instructions.** That night, the old mountaineer died. Several days after the funeral, his wife remembered the shoe box. She climbed up to the attic. There it was, still full of money, sitting by the window. "Oh," she thought, "I knew it. I knew I should have put it in the basement instead of the attic."*

As someone has said, *"We can't take it with us, but we can send it on ahead."*

The great test of our faith is whether we really believe in the promises of Christ. Christ has promised that if we hold onto him, he will never let go of us. He has promised that anything we give to him will be returned a hundredfold. He promised us treasure in heaven. Are you willing to take him at his word?

William Shirer was a prominent newsman during the Second World War for CBS News. After the war CBS fired him (he thinks for being too liberal). For the next twelve years he became consumed with the passion of becoming a writer. During that time, he had difficulty feeding his family. His books rarely sold. It was a dark and desperate time. Out of it came a manuscript -- 1200 pages long. Everyone -- his agent, his editor, his publisher, his friends -- told him it would never sell because of its length.

When it was finally published it came out priced at ten dollars -- the most expensive book of its time -- with no one expecting it to be of any interest to anyone but scholars.

To make a long story short, **THE RISE AND FALL OF THE THIRD REICH** by William Shirer made publishing history. It sold out of its first printing on the first day. Critics praised the writing. Foreign sales were strong. A quarter of a century later, it remains the all-time biggest seller in the history of the Book-of-the-Month club. William Shirer was rewarded many times over for his faith in what he was doing and his devotion to it.

Christ has promised each of us that we will be rewarded a hundredfold for our faith and our devotion to his service. Does that mean if I reach the level of Tithing someday, I will be rich -- as some TV evangelists have suggested?

No. It does mean that the rewards of following Christ WILL FAR EXCEED THE COST. It does mean that you will be making investments that are eternal--that will be paying dividends long after all your material blessings have depreciated into dust. It does mean that you will be rich toward God, and that you will have treasures laid up in heaven.

An ancient source says that Alexander the Great gave instructions that when he died his body should be placed in the coffin in such a way that his hands were visible. He wanted to be seen in such a way so that his hands were open and empty.

All of us move from this world to the next with empty hands. If the promises of Christ are to be believed, though, our hands must be empty so that we can receive from him as we enter Heaven a hundredfold more than we left behind.

Our hands are empty so that we might receive "A DEAL OF A LIFETIME."

WHAT IS THAT DEAL?? The Blessings of the Next Life.

Amen.