

Part 6: Wealth

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[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us to turn to Genesis chapter 2, and I'm going to read verses 8 and 9. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant in the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Today we're continuing our series called Good Dreams, Better Certainties. And we're studying this topic because everybody has dreams, and that's really important to recognise.

And these dreams that we have are good. They give us joy, purpose, direction. They're the things that we hope for and aim for. Now, sometimes those dreams don't come through or don't work out the way we expect, and that can be very difficult.

But sometimes they do come through, and when they do, it's wonderful. On the whole, everyone has dreams, and those dreams are good. But what we want to emphasise again and again and again is that the gospel gives you better certainties.

[1 : 03] And so dreams, as we've been saying, are maybes, hopefulls, possibilities. What the gospel promises is guaranteed and certain and unlosable.

And not only that, it goes beyond everything that we dream of. And we keep coming back to Genesis 1 and 2 because we're wanting to highlight the fact that actually the dreams that we all have, and that everybody around us have, even if people don't believe the Bible or don't even believe in God, the dreams that we have find their origin and their explanation in the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2.

And so what we read about in Genesis 1 and 2 connects with the dreams that we have today. And the rest of the Bible unpacks that. And I hope that we've been seeing that and discovering that as we've been working through these different dreams over the past few weeks.

And it's all reminding us that if you want to know whether or not the gospel is relevant to you, if you want to know whether the Bible has anything to offer you, if you want to know whether all of this makes any sense at all, you need to think about your dreams.

And these are the dreams that we've been looking at. The dream of a home, of career, of relationship, of family, of sport. Today we're looking at the dream of wealth. And in a couple of weeks' time, we'll look at health.

[2 : 25] And then just as the summer holidays begin, we'll be looking at the dream of holidays and retirement. And for all of these dreams, we're saying the same three things. These dreams are good dreams. These dreams are broken dreams.

And the gospel replaces these dreams with better certainties. So as we think about wealth, we want to say, first of all, that the dream of wealth is a good dream.

Now, of all the dreams on our list, this is maybe the one that we're maybe most hesitant to admit to having. I don't think any of us would be so blunt to say, you know, I just dream of being really rich. Not many of us would speak in those terms. But I think that it's true to say that for many of us, if not all of us, deep down, we long for this. And so this is maybe the secret dream that we might be too shy to openly admit.

But for so many of us and for so many people around us, this is the dream. If I was to be told this week that I had a long-lost relative that I didn't know about and they had left me a million pounds, I am pretty sure that I would be delighted.

[3 : 33] And although we're going to see shortly that there are lots and lots of reasons why the dream of wealth is a broken dream, it's important to begin with to recognize that in many ways this is a good dream.

And the reason that we can say it's a good dream is because the Bible gives us many, many examples of how God desires for us to receive and to enjoy a wealth of good things in our life. And you see that right at the start of the Garden of Genesis as we get the wonderful descriptions of the Garden of Eden. God planted a garden and in that garden, he made every tree that was pleasant to the sight and good for food.

So there's this abundant provision. And so in that garden, there was beauty, pleasant to the sight, and there was nourishment. It was good for food. In other words, Adam and Eve, they had an amazing view as they looked out the window and they had an amazing fridge.

They didn't really have fridges, but they had wonderful things in their fridge, in their cupboards.

There was astonishing provision. And then alongside that, you had all these resources. So you can see there, there's the water of the rivers.

[4 : 49] There's gold mentioned there in verse 11. You can see it there. Then there's bdellium, which is probably a resin that smelled very nice.

There's onyx stone, a gemstone. The big point here is that none of this stuff that God is providing is mediocre. God's provision is the best of the best.

And you see that at the very start in the Garden of Eden, and you actually see it continuing through the Old Testament. Mary read for us from Deuteronomy chapter 8, and that's describing the promised land that the Israelites are about to enter.

And it's a land of abundant resources, a good land, a land of brooks of water, fountains and springs, barley, wheat, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive trees, honey, a land in which you'll eat bread without scarcity.

You'll lack nothing. Iron, you'll get copper. You shall eat and be full. And so there's abundance.

There's wonderful resources provided in the promised land.

[5 : 55] And another example of this that you see running through the Old Testament is when the tabernacle was built, and then later when the temple was built to replace it.

So when Israel came out of Egypt, Moses was instructed to tell the people to build a tabernacle, which was like a moving temple. That was replaced by a permanent temple in Jerusalem. And when you read about the building of both of these structures, the provisions and resources used are the best of the best.

So here's the tabernacle. They overlaid the frames with gold, made their rings of gold for holders for the bar, and overlaid the bars with gold.

Purple, blue, purple scarlet yarns, fine twilled linen, cherubim embroidered into them, skillfully worked into the fabric. Four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold, hooks with gold, fine linen.

And it's the best of the best. And in fact, you'll see that the language there and the language of many other aspects of the tabernacle and the temple is actually echoing Eden.

[6 : 58] The same stuff, gold. And there's pomegranates and trees. Cherubim. It's all making connections back to Eden.

It's all reminding us that in God's provision for his people, he does not do stingy. He does not do cheap. He does not do second rate.

And so there's a wealth provided by God, a wealth to be enjoyed. And one of the big reasons why wealth is a good dream is because it can bring wonderful opportunities.

So as Adam and Eve walked in the garden, as Israel entered the promised land, as Solomon built the temple, all of these presented wonderful opportunities.

And so I'll just give you three examples. Wealth brings the opportunity of enjoyment. So there's some very valuable, very, very nice things that humanity can enjoy.

[7 : 57] So we can enjoy great food. We can enjoy beautiful views. You think of yesterday, stunning day, amazing food. We had both of those things at the beach yesterday.

We enjoy precious resources. So that can be things in their natural state like gold or diamonds. Or it can be things in their cultivated state like an iPhone or a John Deere 9R.

These wonderful things that we're able to enjoy. And you think of your home, your house, your garden. It's all just wonderful.

Where do all these things come from? What's their origin? They all come from our Creator. They all come from God.

And He did not create us to miss out on them. He created us to enjoy them. Wealth, secondly, gives the opportunity to invest.

[8 : 55] Now, again, that can imply in loads of ways. It can be the investment of planting seeds in the ground. It can be the investment of being trained and educated. And it can be the investment in an economic system that brings employment, growth, advancement, provision.

Adam was made to work and keep the ground. And we are made to use our resources, cultivate our resources. And our wealth helps us to do that.

And so the reason we can enjoy things like our homes is because people invested in them. We can enjoy this building because people have invested in it so that it can be used. And so investment is a great opportunity that wealth brings.

And so there's the opportunity for enjoyment, the opportunity for investment. But most importantly of all, wealth brings the opportunity to be generous. And so we must never forget that in God's provision of resources in Scripture, that always comes alongside the prohibition against selfishness. And again, that just arises from everything that God is and everything that God does. Everything that's good and beautiful in the garden, it's all God's. Everything that's good and beautiful in the promised land, it's all God's.

[10 : 09] And everything that's good and beautiful in our lives is all God's. And he shares it with us. And in a thousand ways every day, in a thousand ways in the week ahead, we are all going to receive from God's generosity.

And our wealth brings us opportunities to do the same. And there are many, many amazing examples of that. You see it in our community again and again and again. People who are just so amazingly kind.

And I've seen that thousands of times over the years here in our community. And it's such a precious thing. People are generous, kind, always ready and willing to share.

You see it in our nation. Again, wonderful examples of generosity. You see amazing fundraising efforts when somebody's in need. There's great charitable work.

Many, many wonderful things are done in terms of sharing wealth. And even among some of the wealthiest people in the world, there are those who are ready to give of their wealth.

[11 : 18] And you may have seen in the news recently Bill Gates speaking about how he's planning to give away 99% of his wealth. It'll still leave him with a lot. But he's going to give away a vast amount of money, and particularly to help disease control in Africa.

Amazing examples of generosity. One thing I want to highlight here is that being generous feels amazing.

And that is such an important thing to remember. I once heard somebody say that if you practice generosity, you will fall in love with generosity. And I think that's absolutely true.

If you practice generosity, you will fall in love with generosity. You know, the one thing that feels better than getting a big gift is giving a big gift.

I would love a John Deere 9R, but it would be even more amazing to be able to give one of you a John Deere 9R. Or whatever the gift might be.

[12 : 25] And that's one of the reasons why wealth is a good dream. Because it's an easy dream to share. It's an easy dream to share out with others. The dream of wealth is a good dream.

But the dream of wealth is also a broken dream. And I want to just, there's loads that we could say about that, but I want to just highlight three ways in particular in which wealth has become a broken dream.

I want to highlight that wealth, it leads to inequality, it leads to inadequacy, and it leads to idolatry. Inequality, you all know, is a huge issue today. And there's statistics about this online, different websites have different numbers.

But one of the worst I found said that 1% of the world's population has about 50% of the world's wealth.

[13 : 31] And about 50% of the world's population has about 1% of the world's wealth. So it's often depicted in a triangle like this. So the top 1% of people in the world, they have about 50% of the world's wealth.

And so I'll put a pound sign behind that so you know that it's wealth. And then about 50% of the world's population, they have about 1% of the world's wealth shared out between them.

So the inequalities are staggering. Now, that's the 1%, 50%, 50%, 1%. It's like there's decimal points either side of that. But that makes it needed to understand. Whatever the precise numbers are, there is no doubt the inequalities are just, well, they're just astonishing.

And you see that all over the world. And it's interesting that even though there is an abundance of resources in the world, the problem of poverty is still as big an issue today as it has ever been. And we see that in other parts of the world, but we also see it in our own nation. Even in a very developed nation, as we would say, the UK is. There's a massive difference between the rich and the poor, even in our own society.

[14:53] And so this problem of inequality is a huge problem. It was a huge problem in the Old Testament and the New as well. And that's why that throughout the Bible, there's a constant, constant concern for people who are poor.

And so you just go a few chapters on in Deuteronomy. You come to chapter 15 where there's the commandment, And if one of your brothers becomes poor in any of your towns within your land that God's given you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to them and lend him sufficient for his needs, whatever it might be.

Take care that lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart. And you say, in the seventh year, it's the year of release. And you look grudgingly on your poor brother and you give him nothing. And he cries to the Lord against you and you'll be guilty of sin.

You shall give him freely. Your heart shall not be grudging. They'll never cease to be poor in your land. Therefore, open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy, to the poor in your land.

Now, the inequalities that we see around us can cause a whole pile of knock-on effects. So it can lead to a sense of injustice, a sense of frustration, a sense of resentment. And that can threaten the stability of a society.

[16:03] And you see that in lots of times in history where people feel the inequalities are becoming too much. And that can lead to unrest, uprising, resentment, and even violence. So it can have a kind of big widespread problem in a society.

But it can also affect each one of us individually. Because a sense of inequality can rob us of contentment. Especially when we compare ourselves with others.

And we live in a very, very wealth-dominated culture and society. And when we feel like we are short and struggling and that others have more than us, it can leave us very, very unsettled.

Proverbs in the Bible is a great place to go for wisdom in regard to wealth. Here's a couple of examples that highlight the fact that if you ever have to make a choice between being rich or being fair, it's always better to choose fair.

Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice. Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife. So there's inequalities.

[17:07] There's also the problem of inadequacy. And what I mean by that is that for so many of us, no matter how much we have, it's just never going to feel quite enough. Many of you will have heard the famous Rockefeller quote.

A hundred years ago, he was probably the richest man in the world. He was asked, how much money is enough? He replied, just a little bit more. Now, some people, I think, have felt that he was revealing his greed when he said that.

That may have been the case. But I think many have said that actually he was trying to just teach a lesson. Because he himself knew that despite his wealth, it was never actually satisfying him.

And whatever he meant, what he said is true. That no matter how much we have, whether it's money, possessions, holidays, clothes, we always find we want a wee bit more. And the irony is that the wealth that we think is going to satisfy us, it actually just leaves us with a sense of inadequacy and insufficiency.

And what tends to happen is that actually something that's actually amazing becomes not good enough. Because, you know, we today, in our local community here, all of us have more than what people who lived a hundred years ago here had.

[18:28] And what to them would have just been dreamland to us is either normal or maybe at times to us, it's not really good enough.

And that's where we're sort of confronted by the fact that wealth distorts our understanding. And we misjudge our circumstances and our desires get all disordered and muddled up.

And when that happens, we see that our wealth is coming at the price of our wisdom. And yet Proverbs reminds us, how much better to get wisdom than gold? To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

And when we feel that sense of inadequacy regarding our possessions and things like that, it can place huge pressure on our lives. Now, there are many people who are under massive financial pressure through their circumstances that they're born into.

So there are many people in that scenario, and I'm not referring to them when I say what I'm about to say. There are also those people who are massively stretched every month, but it's not because of how little they earn.

[19 : 39] It's because of how much they feel they need to spend. And that inadequacy of wealth is going to be especially true if we are pursuing wealth by being dishonest or by doing things that are wrong.

There's another fascinating verse from Proverbs. Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel. That's a very, very vivid image of, you know, you think, oh, I just want more wealth, and if I just do this, I'll get it.

And you think, it'll satisfy me. And it leaves your mouth bitter, like you've got a mouth full of gravel. More seriously of all, though, wealth is a broken dream because it leads to idolatry.

And in Deuteronomy 8, there's just a really stark warning about that. The wealth that the Israelites are about to enjoy could be a trap. And so God says, beware.

Beware. And so there's the trap that they overestimate themselves, and they think, my power and my might has gotten me this land. And there's the danger that they might forget God as they go in and enjoy this abundant provision.

[20 : 58] And there's the most serious danger of all that if they forget God, they might go after other gods and serve and worship them.

And God warns them so starkly against doing that. And it's that issue of idolatry that lies at the heart of why wealth is a broken dream.

Because instead of riches leading us to our Creator, to worship Him and thank Him, those riches are actually leading us to forget about Him.

And so instead of worshiping the Creator who gives us everything good in our lives, we actually start worshiping the stuff that He's given us. instead of Him as the one who provided it all.

A great example of that came in the Exodus, where as the Israelites left Egypt, they were able to plunder the gold of the Egyptians around them. And then when they got out into the wilderness, they used that gold to make a calf that they then bowed down and worshipped.

[22 : 04] And so the stuff that God had provided was then formed into the idol that they worshipped instead of God. And it's an astonishing example of how wealth leads to the trap of idolatry.

Now today, very few people in Scotland will bow before a golden statue or something physical. But we must always remember that the physical idols that we read about in the Old Testament or that we maybe see in other religions in the world today, those are just a manifestation of heart idols that all of us are drawn towards.

There are idols in our hearts that we will so often devote ourselves to. And many theologians have helpfully summarized those heart idols under three headings.

That there's the idol of power, there's the idol of comfort, and there's the idol of approval. And what's been highlighted is the fact that we will all tend towards one or two of these.

So you might look at power and you might think, well, I'm not particularly bothered about power. I don't need to be in charge in every room that I'm in. But I hate being uncomfortable.

[23 : 22] And I don't want to be disturbed in my life. Or you might think, well, I'm actually not bothered about how comfortable I live in. I'm not bothered about my house, my car, my sofa, my size of my TV or whatever.

But I desperately want people's approval. Or you might think, well, I don't care what people think of me. I want to be in charge. And I want people to listen to me.

And all of us will gravitate towards one of these. And the key point I want to highlight is that wealth feeds all of these idols.

So wealth can give you a sense of power. You're like, well, I'm earning more than the other people around me. I'm a bigger house. I'm kind of higher up the social ladder. And so that makes me just a wee bit better and a wee bit more important than other people.

And I'm going to use that power to exert my influence. And very often you'll see throughout history, and even today, the most powerful people in the world have got a lot of money behind them.

[24 : 25] Wealth can win you the approval of others. That's so easy, isn't it? You know, you just, you're like, nicer car. I mean, if I turn up tomorrow in a nine hour and car away, you're all going to think I'm amazing.

Well, no, you're not. But you know what I mean? We think that, don't we? We think that, that if we've got the nicer car, the better clothes, whatever it might be, that people are going to have a higher sense of approval of us.

And of course, it's obvious to say wealth can give you so, so many comforts. Honda Goldwing, that's a comfortable motorbike to ride. And in many other ways, wealth will feed these idols all the time.

These idols are pulling us away from God. And this is where we need to realize that although wealth is a broken dream, it's still an immensely powerful dream.

And so it's broken in that it's brought all sorts of moral decay to our lives, but it's not broken in the sense of lacking any power. It is unbelievably powerful.

[25 : 24] And, you know, whether we are willing to admit it with our lips or not, our actions will so often make it clear that this dream of wealth is the dream that we're chasing. And so all the time we're being sucked towards idolatry.

That idolatry will manifest itself in covetousness when we want what we don't have. And yet we must remember Jesus' words. All of that's a false promise. Riches are deceitful.

They're promising us something that they won't deliver. And you can prove that so easily because there are so, so many rich people in the world, and they're miserable.

And ultimately, wealth will evaporate. Proverbs, again, teaches us about that. Riches don't profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.

Your Lamborghini and your private plane and your tractor and your motorbike are all going to rust. And so although wealth is a good dream, there are so many ways in which it's a broken dream.

[26 : 33] And that's why contentment is so important. And I'm going to read these wonderful verses from 1 Timothy 6, which capture that. Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.

But if we've got food and clothing, with these we'll be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires, that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It's through this craving that some have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. So wealth's a good dream, wealth's a broken dream.

Last I want to say is that the gospel replaces this dream with better certainties. Again, there's loads that we could say here.

The key thing I want to highlight is that the gospel does not tell you to abandon the dream of wealth. It tells you to redefine your dream of wealth.

[27 : 36] Because when the New Testament speaks about the promises of the gospel, it does not hesitate to use the language of wealth and riches. There's verses there. I'm running out of time.

I picked verse 7 of Ephesians 2 at the start in our call to worship, to speak about how the gospel gives us immeasurable riches. All these other verses are also speaking in the same way.

And they're not speaking about material wealth. They're speaking about everything that material wealth is just a poor imitation of. And so the glory and abundance and fullness of wealth in this life is tiny compared to the glory, abundance, enjoyment, opportunity that Jesus promises to us.

And the amazing thing about the gospel is that the unsearchable riches of Christ that we read about there are shared riches, so there's no inequality.

And they're abundant riches, so there's no inadequacy. And they are eternal riches coming from the one true God. There's no fleeting idols, no false hopes, no empty promises.

[28 : 50] And all of it, all of it is to the level of abundance. When Ephesians 1 speaks about the riches of God's grace, there's a wonderful word to describe it, that these gifts are lavished upon us.

And that's a word that just speaks of abundance, of going beyond, of exceeding, of overflowing. That's the level that the gospel works at.

Now, last thing I want to say is this. I'm running out of time, which is so frustrating. No, I'm not running out of time. I've used up my time seven minutes ago. But anyway, we're nearly there.

Two minutes. You need to think about this. We need to think about our theology of enough. What do I mean by that?

Well, the theme of wealth makes us think about that word enough. And the desire for wealth comes from the fact that we feel like we just don't have quite enough of what we feel we need.

[29 : 49] And when we think about that word enough, when we think about our theology of enough, you can all make a very big mistake. You can easily think that the gospel is saying that in terms of your wealth, your enough is far too big.

So, you know, we're expecting too much. We need to be more content with less. And in a certain sense, that's true. But if you think that the Bible is telling you today that your enough is too big, then you are wrong.

Because the truth is, your enough is far too small. Your enough is far too small.

Because God's enough is way, way bigger than yours. And in terms of salvation, he wants to lavish you with his enough.

And for God, his enough is sending his son to become one of us. His enough is the atonement, all of our sins placed on Christ, all of his righteousness placed on us.

[31 : 02] His enough is the resurrection, death conquered. His enough is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to dwell in all of our hearts. And ultimately, his enough is nothing less than the new creation and all the astonishing fullness of that.

The beautiful city of God where there's no more pain, no more death, no more sorrow, and where there's an abundance of blessing poured out. And that is God's enough.

And his enough is way, way bigger than yours. And that's what I want you to see more than anything else.

When we think about your dream of riches, please don't think, you know, oh, God doesn't want to give me that much. Please remember that God wants to give you far, far more.

And he's calling all of us today to trust in him, follow him, and serve him. Amen. Let's pray.