

September 22, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 16:1-13.

1. Why did Jesus teach so often about money?
2. How do we explain Jesus making up a story about a cheating manager who was commended?
3. What is the main lesson Jesus taught us with this story?
4. How can we use money to make friends who will meet us in heaven?
5. What is the lesson about faithfulness in little things resulting in responsibility in bigger things?

A LESSON ABOUT MONEY Luke 16:1-13

In the sermon on the plain Jesus might have shocked some of the most religious people in the audience when He declared, *“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation”* (Luke 6:24). A few months later, in response to a request for Jesus to make a brother share an inheritance, Jesus told the story about the rich fool who was so focused on money he didn’t prepare for the future (12:13-21). Now it appears that in fairly quick succession Jesus told the story about the prodigal son who wasted his inheritance (15:11-32), the story about the dishonest manager and his mishandling of money (16:1-13), and the story about the rich man

and Lazarus, another rich man who failed to prepare for the future (16:19-31). This will be followed in Luke’s account by Jesus’ confrontation with the rich young ruler (18:18-30), and the wonderful story about Zacchaeus the tax collector (19:1-10).

It is rather easy to conclude from this evidence that the place money plays in our lives is quite important. But the lessons Jesus taught us stand in vivid conflict with the natural desires of our flesh such as greed, covetousness, jealousy, and envy. We see far too much evidence of that every day.

Just last week, Antonio Brown, the very gifted N.F.L. wide receiver reached the breaking point in his relationship with the Oakland Raiders and asked to be released from his contract. According to the gossips and so-called news reports, Brown refused to attend training camp and balked about starting the season because he didn’t like or agree with his authorities (i.e. coach and administration). This is the same guy to whom the Steelers gave a four-year \$68 million contract back in 2017. In March of this year, with \$39 million still remaining in the contract, Brown walked away into the arms of the Raiders for a three-year \$50 million agreement.

But Mr. Brown didn’t care too much for authorities at the Raiders telling him how to play football, so last week he walked again. No problem. The New England Patriots were delighted to lay a one-year contract worth \$15 million on the table less than 24 hours after Brown left his second team in less than six months.

If you are thinking, “That whole scenario is ludicrous,” you and I are thinking alike. I’m sorry but in my opinion, no one is worth that much money. Okay, maybe no one other than preachers and their fellow Christians? Too often we are reminded of hotshot preacher/entertainers who rake in astronomical salaries. Of course there are the nice guys like Joel Osteen who refuses to take the \$200,000 annual salary his church offers him. He doesn’t need to because his net worth is estimated at \$50 million.

According to fliers and articles that come across my desk fairly regularly, huge salaries for Christian servants are not only acceptable but are clearly God’s will. The old “health-wealth-and prosperity” gospel associated with the Charismatics in the 1980’s has gone mainstream. This false doctrine can be heard coming from the pulpits of Charismatic churches, liberal churches, evangelical churches, and

even Catholic churches. The advertisements I receive invite me to seminar after conference to learn this new wrinkle in God's will. Who doesn't want to hear that it is God's will for you to be filthy rich?

Far better for us to listen to Jesus' teaching on how to handle our finances. God does not force all of his people into a box of poverty. God does bless some of his people with financial excess. God allows others of his people to just get by. And many of God's people are like Paul who confessed to being experienced in having abundance and having poverty. Jesus taught us from this story that how much money we have is not the important issue. The issue is, "What is our attitude toward what God has given us?"

The Story (vv.1-8a).

At the outset we learn that Jesus addressed the story to the disciples. *He also said to the disciples (v.1a)*. It is good to remember that the term *disciples* is generally broader than inclusion of just the twelve special ones. The "apostles" were the twelve specific followers who Jesus chose to take over the gospel ministry (except Judas Iscariot). Disciples is the broader term that, when used in the general sense, included people who followed Jesus on some level.

Therefore, in this situation, Jesus could have been speaking to a group who included the tax collectors who had gathered around Him (15:1). They would need some, and might even be interested in, instruction about how to handle money. Of the forty parables, allegories, and analogies Jesus told, one-third of them deal in some way with money. This is an important story and lesson.

The story begins by telling about a man in conflict who had reason to be concerned. A manager was caught by his master being wasteful. *"There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager'" (vv.1b-2)*.

More than ever, in this text we must remind ourselves that this is a make-believe story Jesus created to teach a very important truth. The manager is a loser in every way possible. We should not try to spin the story to make the guy look admirable, someone we should

emulate. He wasn't admirable. He was incompetent. The word translated wasting (*diaskopizo*) is the same word in 15:13 that describes how the prodigal wasted his inheritance. The word means to scatter abroad. Managers were not supposed to do that kind of thing with the master's possessions.

Paul set the biblical standard for managers when he wrote, *Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy (1 Corinthians 4:2)*. The guy in this story was found to be quite the opposite of trustworthy. He was supposed to be managing the rich man's household, which obviously included his business. He was managing—in a very poor way. He was untrustworthy. The word *wasting* also implies that the man was deceptive (which becomes very clear in vv.5-7) and dishonest (v.8).

As one should expect, the master fired the dishonest, incompetent manager (*for you can no longer be manager, v.2*). But the master made the mistake of allowing the guy to hang around and damage the company. That is obvious in the words, *Turn in the account of your management (v.2)*.

Having received his "pink slip," the manager rightly wondered what he was going to do. *"And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg'" (v.3)*. The terminated employee had two options, neither of which was pleasant. He could dig or he could beg. He was honest enough to admit that having lived life seated behind a desk (figuratively), he was in no physical condition to dig. But being an important person, he was *ashamed to beg*. This manager was not a slave or household servant. Jesus would have used specific words to call him such. Rather, he was a free man and, in light of his master's wealth, a man who enjoyed high social standing. Of course he would be ashamed to beg.

The point of this story is that, when faced with a dilemma, the manager was shrewd enough to solve the conflict. He chose to use his position of influence (as long as it remained) to prepare for the future. He said to himself, *"I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses" (v.4)*. Again, we need to understand that the manager was still on the job, not *removed* yet. In that position, he could ingratiate the "people" so they would be obligated to help him. The "people" were

businessmen, farmers, with whom the manager had transacted business in the past.

In the first century Jewish culture, reciprocation for favors and kindness was expected. Jesus pointed out this practice when He was a guest at a banquet. *He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid" (Luke 14:12).*

In light of that practice, the manager came up with a questionable but shrewd resolution. *"So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'" (vv.5-7).*

The manager accepted half the olive oil that a debtor owed his master. One hundred measures of oil was 875 gallons or the oil from crushed olives from 150 trees. It would be equivalent to three years' wages. So the manager cheated his master out of a year-and-a-half wages and the debtor was delighted. From another debtor, the manager accepted a 20% reduction in wheat owed his master. One hundred measures of wheat would have been equivalent to ten years' wages for the common laborer. Therefore, in this case, the manager robbed his master of two years' wages and the debtor was delighted.

What is shocking about Jesus' story is the master's response. The manager was obviously dishonest. The master admitted that. It was not as though the master was deluded or in denial. He saw exactly what the manager had done. This is the part of the story that makes no sense to us because it is illogical by modern standards. *The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness (v.8a).*

We must wonder, why in the name of common sense did the master commend the manager for shrewdness? Even the people hearing the story would have been shocked (like the Pharisees were shocked about the father accepting and embracing the prodigal). But notice that the master did not commend the manager for being honest, dependable, faithful, or trustworthy. He was none of those things.

Rather, the master complimented the manager for being shrewd.

The word almost always has a negative connotation to us. We refer to a conniver, crook, con-artist as being shrewd. That definition certainly would fit this manager. But that is not what the master commended. The master acknowledged that the manager exercised common, practical sense. We might call it "street smarts." What the manager did was totally unacceptable. But he did exercise human wisdom to prepare for his future.

Again this is a parable, a story. We know that in real life, this guy would be prosecuted and go to jail. The advantages of practicing theft and dishonesty is not the lesson. The lesson is the importance for Christ's followers to exercise common sense wisdom principles as we manage God's financial gifts.

The Lesson (vv.8b-13).

The real lesson Jesus taught us in this story is the principle of faithfulness. It is actually found in an enigmatic conclusion that is bound to generate a couple of questions for us. First, we must wonder if it is good to be shrewd? Is that what Jesus meant when He seemed to compliment sinners? *"For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light" (v.8b).*

The "sons of this world" refers to all the unsaved people whose only hope (as sinners) is in this world. They exercise much diligence, are shrewd, in preparing for their future here. They even deceive, out do, get one up on their friends and associates as they prepare. In our world we are bombarded with advertisements about preparing for the future with long-term healthcare (nursing home insurance), sufficient retirement funds, insurance to cover any and every potential loss. To the point that we are a bit concerned for or even suspicious of folks who don't prepare because they might become a burden on us who did prepare.

Of course Solomon reminds us in Ecclesiastes how futile all the preparation in life is. *Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For of the wise as of the*

fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool!” (Ecclesiastes 2:15-16).

Jesus’ point is that the sinners are more diligent exercising human wisdom to prepare for a futile future than the sons of light are as we prepare for eternal life. Sons of light are those who have been drawn into the light of God’s truth by the Light of the World, Jesus, to walk in the light of His teaching. We know the passing stuff of this world is futile. But how do we use it?

A second question from Jesus’ lesson is, “Should we use money to make friends?” That does appear to be what Jesus meant when He said, “*And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings*” (v.9). Unrighteous wealth does not mean that money in and of itself is evil. We are warned that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). But here Jesus simply referred to money as that which cannot inherit heaven. Money is part of this world system, part of all that is passing away, part of what cannot inherit heaven. Nevertheless, we children of light, followers of Christ, are saddled with the responsibility of using things that are not eternal for eternal purposes.

And so to answer the second question: “Yes,” Jesus did indeed teach that we should use money to make friends. That is what the world does. However, the friends made by a sinful friend using unrighteous money will die and never be seen again. The lesson here is that we should invest passing money in the eternal work of the gospel. The very important truth is that money can be used to create means and methods for sharing the good news of the gospel. When a sinner hears the good news, is convicted by the Holy Spirit, confesses sin and is forgiven, he or she becomes our heavenly friend. We will see those people again and enjoy fellowship with them forever. Jesus taught that this is the wisest of investments.

Furthermore, Jesus taught that faithfulness genders greater responsibility. “*One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much*” (v.10). Character is revealed in small things. Never claim that if you had more money you would give more to gospel work. Jesus knows better. Remember that Jesus commented on the value of the

two small copper coins the widow put in the temple treasury. The person who does not invest in the eternal gospel work with what they have will never invest in the gospel well.

The last couple of verses give us the application of this very important principle (vv.11-13). Unfaithfulness yields negative consequences. It is a question of unfaithfulness in wealth. *If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches (v.11)?* Again the reference to unrighteous wealth simply means money and possessions of this earth. Drawing on the previous argument, Jesus posed that God will not entrust true riches to the person who hoards his money and will not invest in the Lord’s work.

Obviously, true riches are eternal in nature. That does not teach that people who refuse to give an offering at church lose their salvation. That idea would make for quite a manipulative sermon. Rather the idea is that riches connected with God, riches that last in eternity are at God’s disposal. Those eternal riches must have something to do with the rewards Paul talked about. *He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor (1 Corinthians 3:8). If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward (1 Corinthians 3:14). Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God (1 Corinthians 4:5). For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (2 Corinthians 5:10).*

True riches must also refer to spiritual blessings in this life. Therefore, Jesus’ warning seems to be that failure to invest money or wealth in the gospel results in spiritual poverty in life and shame in eternity, which naturally leads to the question of unfaithfulness in another’s property. Jesus asked, *And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own (v.12)?* All possessions and money belong to God. They are His gifts to us. We are managers whom He requires to be faithful in management of His possessions.

Oh, but someone might protest that they really are not unfaithful toward God. Jesus pointed out that faithfulness to money is unfaithfulness to God. The principle is that you can only serve one master at a time. *“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (v.13a)*. Money/wealth is a master. Often it can be a horrible taskmaster. God is our rightful master. You can **serve** God and **use** money to that end. You cannot **serve** money and **use** God. In fact, you cannot serve God **and** anything else. *“You cannot serve God and money” (v.13b)*.

There is little doubt that money is one of the most important, most powerful, most pernicious idols in the American culture. There was a time when people would blush about being too focused on money. Now even professing Christians fall into the “grab for more” game. How sad it will be for those who claimed to love Christ to stand before Him one day having made no investment of eternal value. Today is a good day for all of us to step back and take a fair and honest assessment of our “books.” How does the investment in the line item called self compare to the investment in the line item called God’s work?