

Luke 16 v 1-13

Additional notes, following our 0830 passage complexity!

In his book, 'How to Preach a Parable', Eugene Lowry says that in order to understand a parable **we must look for the itch before we can feel the scratch.** *We must sense the tension before we can receive relief from the tension.* We must place ourselves in the puzzling setting before we can see the resolution to the puzzle. Lowry calls this "finding the focus of the story."

The Wall Street Journal quoted an anonymous wit who defined money as **“an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider for everything except happiness.”** The writer might have added that money is also a provoker of covetousness and competition, a wonderful servant but a terrible master. *The love of money is still “a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10 nkjv) and has helped fill our world with corruption and lust (1 Peter 1:4).*

When you read our Lord's sermons and parables, you are struck with the fact that He had a great deal to say about material wealth. He ministered to people who, for the most part, were poor and who thought that acquiring more wealth was the solution to all their problems. Jesus was not blind to the needs of the poor, and by His example and teaching, *He encouraged His followers to share what they had with others. The early church was a fellowship of people who willingly shared their possessions with the less fortunate (Acts 2:44–47; 4:33–37).*

In His portrait of the prodigal and the elder brother, Jesus described two opposite philosophies of life. Prior to his repentance, the prodigal wasted his life, but his elder brother only spent his life as a faithful drudge. *Both attitudes are wrong, for the Christian approach to life is that we should invest our lives for the good of others and the glory of God.* This chapter emphasizes that truth: life is a stewardship, and we are invited to use our God-given opportunities faithfully. One day we must give an account to the Lord of what we have done with all He has given to us, so we had better heed what Jesus says in this chapter about the right and wrong use of wealth.

Neither of the two accounts in this chapter is called a parable either by Jesus or by Luke, so it is likely that our Lord was describing actual happenings.

However, whether they are actual events or only parables, the spiritual values are the same.

The Right Use of Wealth (16:1–13)

A foolish steward (vv. 1–2). A steward is someone who manages another's wealth. He does not own that wealth himself, but he has the privilege of enjoying it and using it for the profit of his master. **The most important thing about a steward is that he serve his master faithfully** (1 Cor. 4:2). When he looks at the riches around him, the steward must remember that they belong to his master, not to him personally, and that they must be used in a way that will please and profit the master.

This particular steward forgot that he was a steward and began to act as if he were the owner. *He became a “prodigal steward” who wasted his master's wealth. His master heard about it and immediately asked for an inventory of his goods and an audit of his books. He also fired his steward.*

Before we judge this man too severely, let's examine our own lives to see how faithful we have been as stewards of what God has given to us. *To begin with, we are stewards of the material wealth that we have, whether much or little, and we will one day have to answer to God for the way we have acquired it and used it.*

Christian stewardship goes beyond paying God a tithe of our income and then using the

remainder as we please. True stewardship means that we thank God for all that we have (Deut. 8:11–18) and use it as He directs. Giving God 10 percent of our income is a good way to begin our faithful stewardship, but we must remember that God should shape and influence, the whole, not just a part!

We are also stewards of our time (Eph. 5:15–17). The phrase “redeeming the time” comes from the business world and means “buying up the opportunity.” Time is eternity, minted into precious minutes and handed to us to use either wisely or carelessly. *The main lesson of this narrative is that the steward, as dishonest as he was, used his opportunity wisely and prepared for the future. Life ceased to be “enjoyment” and became “investment.”*

Christians are stewards of the gifts and abilities God has given them (1 Peter 4:10), and we must use those gifts and abilities to serve others. The thief says, “What’s yours is mine—I’ll take it!” **The selfish man says, “What’s mine is mine—I’ll keep it!” But the Christian must say, “What’s mine is a gift from God—I’ll share it!”** We are stewards, and we must use our abilities to win the lost, encourage the saints, and meet the needs of hurting people.

Finally, God’s people are stewards of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:4). God has committed the treasure of His truth to us (2 Cor. 4:7), and we must guard this treasure (1 Tim. 6:20) and invest it in the lives of others (2 Tim. 2:2). The enemy wants to rob the church of this treasure (Jude 3–4), and we must be alert and courageous.

Like this steward, we will one day have to give an account of our stewardship (Rom. 14:10–12; 2 Cor. 5:10ff.). If we have been faithful, the Lord will give us His commendation and reward (Matt. 25:21; 1 Cor. 4:5); but if we have not been faithful, we will lose those blessings, even though we are assured of salvation and heaven above..... (1 Cor. 3:13–15).

Vance Havner often said, “God called us to play the game, not keep the score.” If we are faithful stewards, God will reward us generously, and that reward will bring glory to His name.

A wise steward (vv. 3–8). The steward knew he would lose his job. He could not change the past, but he could prepare for the future. How? By making friends of his master’s creditors so that they would take him in when his master threw him out. He gave each of them a generous discount, provided they paid up immediately, and they were only too glad to cooperate. Even his master complimented him on his clever plan (Luke 16:8).

Jesus did not commend the steward for robbing his master or for encouraging others to be dishonest. Jesus commended the man for his wise use of opportunity. “The children of this world” are experts at seizing opportunities for making money and friends and getting ahead. God’s people should take heed and be just as wise when it comes to managing the spiritual affairs of life. *“The children of this world” are wiser only “in their generation”; they see the things of time, but not the things of eternity. Because the child of God lives “with eternity’s values in view,” he should be able to make far better use of his opportunities.*

The application (vv. 9–13). Jesus gave three admonitions, based on the experience of the steward. First, He admonishes us to use our opportunities wisely (Luke 16:9). One of these days, life will end, and we will not be able to earn or use money. Therefore, while we have the opportunity, we must invest our money in “making friends” for the Lord. This means winning people to Christ, who will one day welcome us to heaven. Our lives and our resources will one day end, so it behooves us to use them wisely.

It is tragic to see how God’s wealth is being wasted by Christians who live as though Jesus never died and judgment is never coming. The old couplet is certainly true:

The only difference between men and boys is that men buy more expensive toys!

The heritage of the past must be used wisely in the present to guarantee spiritual dividends

in the future. All of us should want to meet people in heaven who trusted Christ because we helped to pay the bill for gospel witness around the world, starting at home. Thoreau wrote that a man is wealthy in proportion to the number of things he can afford to do without, and he was right. I once heard the late Jacob Stam pray, "Lord, the only thing we know about sacrifice is how to spell the word." I wonder if today some of us can even spell the word!

Our Lord's second admonition is be faithful in the way you use your material wealth (Luke 16:10–12). He makes it clear that you cannot detach the "spiritual" from the "material."

Why is our Lord so concerned about the way we use money? Because money is not neutral; *it has a propensity toward evil (that august-sounding phrase "the mammon of unrighteousness"), and only God can sanctify it and use it for good.* It is significant that both Paul and Peter called money "filthy lucre" (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7, 11; 1 Peter 5:2). Apparently by its very nature, money defiles and debases those who love it and let it control their lives. **"We cannot safely use mammon," writes Richard Foster, "until we are absolutely clear that we are dealing, not just with mammon, but with unrighteous mammon" (Money, Sex and Power, Harper & Row, p57).**

People who are unfaithful in the way they use money are also unfaithful in the way they use the "true riches" of God's kingdom. *We cannot be orthodox in our theology and at the same time heretical in the way we use money.* God will not commit His true riches to individuals or ministries that waste money and will not give an honest accounting to the people who have supported them. *When it came to money, Paul was very careful that everything was honest "not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor. 8:21).*

Finally, the Lord encourages us to be wholly devoted to God and single-minded (Luke 16:13; and see Matt. 6:19–24). We cannot love or serve two masters, any more than we can walk in two directions at one time. If we choose to serve money, then we cannot serve God. **If we choose to serve God, then we will not serve money. Jesus is demanding integrity, total devotion to God that puts Him first in everything (Matt. 6:33).** If God is our Master, then money will be our servant, and we will use our resources in the will of God. *But if God is not our Master, then we will become the servants of money, and money is a terrible master!* We will start wasting our lives instead of investing them, and we will one day find ourselves "friendless" as we enter the gates of heaven.

Henry Fielding wrote, "Make money your god and it will plague you like the devil!"

Jesus said, "Make money your servant and use today's opportunities as investments in tomorrow's dividends." Be a wise steward!

In I Timothy 6:17-19 as rendered in Peterson's paraphrase of The Message // **God says, "Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God,.....to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life."**

From 9th Sunday after Trinity

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