

Luke 16 • A Parable, A Story and the Kingdom of God

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In Luke chapter 16, the very first verse begins by saying, “*He also said to the (His) disciples.*” (ESV)

The discussions that are going on here are a continuation of what's been going on, but we see here in this first phrase that Jesus is directing this portion specifically to His disciples, and that means it's not being directed to the crowd at large or anything like that, although they may very well be listening in. And He says, He begins to tell them a story. He says,

“*...There was a rich man who had a manager, (Your Bible may say, steward. This is someone who was put in charge of the financial affairs of a fairly large household when there was a lot of buying and selling that needed to take place. And He tells us here that) and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions.*”

In other words, the manager or household steward was found to be unfaithful in his work, whether he was pilfering money for his own personal gain or whether he was just losing it by bad management. It says in verse 2 that,

“*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.’³ 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.⁴ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’*”

⁵ *So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’⁶ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’⁷ 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.’”*

You can see what's going on here in the final hours of his employment the steward is renegotiating the terms of the contracts that his master had with these

various debtors in order to ingratiate himself to them so that they would be obligated to help him if, what he figured happens. And that is if he falls on hard times. He's figuring he can get a return for the favor someday down the road. Verse 8,

“The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.”

Now, stop there for a moment. What Jesus has just said here in verse 8, this last verse we read, is really the point of the story, and you need to point that out because the point of the story is not to applaud dishonesty or, necessarily, the sneaky sort of a way that this guy is doing business, but rather to speak of his clever way of using his resources, the resources that were at his disposal in order to accomplish his goals.

Now, the point here, again isn't to give you business advice. The point here is to make the point that sometimes unbelievers, people of the world who don't know the Lord, are often smarter about the way they use what they've been given than are the children of God. Sometimes we're just not thinking right, we're not thinking about how we might use what the Lord has given us, and we're not thinking ahead when we ought to be thinking ahead. He goes on here in verse 9 to say,

⁹ *“And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, (And unrighteous wealth is a term that simply refers to the wealth of this world that is often obtained through unrighteous means and can certainly be the means of tripping people up, He says) “use that wealth so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”*

What Jesus is telling us to do here is to think ahead, and to use what we've been given for spiritual purposes. In other words, to invest into the kingdom of God. Not that we're buying our way to heaven. We understand that's not what's being said here, but rather using our earthly resources to make a difference in how we're received into our eternal dwellings later on. And that's the point of the story. That's the point of the whole thing.

The people of this world, I mean, and it's seeped its way into the Church, there's a huge, a lot of emphasis, I guess I should say, on your financial investments and 401k's and all these other things that people can invest in. You've got to prepare for retirement. And there's nothing wrong with that. The problem is it starts to take over the way you and I think about our financial resources, and we

start doing like the world does. We plan for retirement, but that's not when your life comes to an end. Your life doesn't come to an end.

You're going to be going into eternity and the things that you do here, and the investments that you make here are going to have some payoff in eternity at those later times. And see, He's saying that believers forget that. Here's this shrewd manager, this unfaithful guy, who had the smarts to say, hey, I've got to plan for my future because if I'm not able to work, I want people to be able to like me so that I can curry some favor from them.

And again, Jesus isn't telling you to go out and do that. Rather, you and I are to look toward eternity and say, what is it the Lord has given me? How can I use it so that when I go to be with the Lord, there's going to be a benefit to this sort of a thing. Look what Jesus goes on to say in verse 10. He says,

“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, (Doesn't matter whether you've been given a lot or a little in this your time on earth. If you're faithful with it, you're going to be faithful with a lot) and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.”

He says, *“¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, (that you have during your time on earth) who will entrust to you the true riches?”* Later on because you haven't proven yourself, right?

In other words, if you've been unfaithful with what God has given you here on earth and you've just done what you needed to do to pad your own resources, but there was no investment in eternity, no investment in the Kingdom. He's saying hey, do you really have an expectation that you're going to be entrusted with a lot to invest later on? Verse 12 He says,

“And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, (in other words, if you haven't been faithful with what belongs to somebody else, what makes you think that you're going to be given and be faithful with what belongs to you or what is your own?”

Again, it's important to make the point here about what Jesus is saying about how we use our resources, and He's not telling you to obsess over your money. In fact, quite the opposite. He makes that clear in the next statement in verse 13. He says,

“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. (And then He makes this point) You cannot serve God and money.”

You can't do it. So, He's not telling you to obsess over money. He's not telling you to. I want you to think about your worldly wealth and I want you, no. That's what the world does. And if you obsess over it, pretty soon you're going to serve it. And if you serve it, then it's going to be your master. And if that's your master, then that's your only master. That's the point.

No, I'm not telling you to obsess, but I am telling you to be smart and to think ahead. And if, listen, if you're planning for your retirement and you're not planning for anything beyond that, you've missed the point of life.

You've missed the point of the eternal life that God has given you through Jesus Christ. You've missed the point that this life that we're living right now is the means by which we invest into eternal life. They tell you when you die you can't take anything with you. That's not true. Not for the believer. No, you can't take your favorite car or your dog or your horse or whatever. Okay, but there is a great deal that you can take with you as it relates to the rewards that come your way for how you lived your life and how you invested faithfully the resources that God gave you.

Let me show you a passage from the Proverbs that speaks into this from Proverbs chapter 19. It says,

Proverbs 19:17 (ESV)

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord and he will repay him for his deed.

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That's a very interesting verse. It tells me that I can invest into eternity, into the kingdom of eternity by the way that I use the resources God has given me today. And by simply blessing the poor, that passage reminds you and I that God has this incredible accounting system that remembers everything you've done related to the good things, and the way you've blessed others, and the way you've used your resources to invest into the lives of others.

It's really a pretty cool thing. Hey, use your stuff. Use what God gives you with eternity in mind. Now, as we move on in the chapter it appears that some of the

Pharisees were listening in to this conversation because we're told in verse 14 that, *“The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, (and that's a very important point, they were listening to this) heard all these things, and they ridiculed (Jesus) him.”*

Now let me stop there and explain why they ridiculed. Jesus is basically talking about money like it's not the most important thing in this life and you're to invest it for eternity. And the Pharisees believed very strongly that the presence of wealth was a proof that you had approval by God.

In other words, if you had money and you wore nice clothes, you walked around, people would look at you and they would basically say, whoa, God approves of that man, right? It's, you can see it. You can see why, look at all this wealth he has. Okay. Well, Jesus responds to the Pharisees here. In verse 15 by saying,

“And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

What is Jesus saying here? He's basically exposing a very common mistake made by men. And that is, that based on what you have or what you don't have, people assume that God either is blessing you or He's punishing you. If we see somebody with a lot of stuff, we say that God is really, oh man, that guy has the approval of God. And if somebody doesn't have much, it's like, boy, I wonder what he did. Yeah, didn't get his life going in order, and so God wasn't able to bless him.

Well, there's a problem with that. That's what the Pharisees were doing, and you notice Jesus said, *“you justify yourselves before men.”* What He means is you justify the things that you do, the things that you say and the things that you believe predicated upon the fact that you have a lot of money and you think that because you have a lot of money that you must be right about the way you're living and about the things you believe, right?

And Jesus is reminding them that that kind of thinking is wrong. To judge my actions as good and appropriate in God's eyes just because I've received good things from God is to engage in a very dangerous self-deception. I want you to remember what Jesus said about how He blesses people. In Matthew chapter 5 up on the screen for you. It says,

Mathew 5:45b (ESV)

For he makes his son to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For he makes his son to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

That's God's character. Right? He doesn't withhold sunshine from people or give rain to bless people. He does it across the board. And that means that you and I can't look at what I have or don't have or what somebody else has or doesn't have and say they have God's approval, they don't have God's approval. That's what the Pharisees were doing. That's what was wrong. And Jesus continues talking to the Pharisees and He says this,

¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it."

This is a great statement. What Jesus is saying in this verse is that things are changing and that His own appearance on the scene is a watershed event. Things are changing. He says the Law and the prophets ruled up until the time of John. Do you understand that John the Baptist was really like the final Old Testament prophet, if you will. And up until the time of John, the Old Testament, meaning that's what the Law and the prophets is, essentially ruled.

But with the coming of Jesus, a new day was dawning. And you remember, John was the one who introduced the coming of Messiah, and then Jesus came on the scene and began to speak of the Kingdom of God, and teach people about the Kingdom, and the completely different dynamic that brought into play, and the Pharisees rejected it because it wasn't part of what they were doing. It wasn't what they were building. And they rejected Jesus and all that He was saying to the people.

It didn't go along with what they believed and what they were accomplishing. We actually talked about this in our study this last Wednesday. We're going through the Psalms on Wednesday night, and this last Wednesday we ended with Psalm 118 which is a Messianic Psalm. That means a Psalm that gives insight, prophetically, about the coming of Messiah and it's a really, really incredible Psalm and I want to put a portion of it up on the screen for you because it goes like this.

Psalm 118:22 -23 (ESV)

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes.

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Now again, the whole Psalm, Psalm 118 is prophetic in its focus. But what that Psalm is saying is exactly what we're reading here in Luke chapter 16. The Pharisees and religious leaders had a building project in mind. They believed they were the Kingdom of God, and they had a blueprint for what they wanted to do, and Jesus didn't fit into it because He was preaching a different message. He was preaching the Kingdom of God, and so, they rejected Him. But what they were unknowingly rejecting was, in fact, the cornerstone of God's blueprint of God's building plan.

And although you and I don't build with cornerstones anymore, we build with foundations, but that's what a cornerstone was. And it was the plumb line upon all the other where all the other stones were laid, and they were laid upon the cornerstone, and they bore the weight, and so the cornerstone is this key element to the building process. Jesus Christ is the key element to what God is building, but He was rejected by the builders, and yet He was the very cornerstone of what God was accomplishing.

And the reason that the Pharisees rejected Jesus is because they were building something else. They sought to build something that God never sought to build. And essentially what that was is they had taken the Law, and they turned it into something God never intended it to be. You see, the Jews eventually came to believe that the Law was the means by which people were saved. And if you look through the Old Testament, you will find that never once did God give them the Law and then promise them that if they kept it, they'd go to heaven.

He never said that. That wasn't the intent of the Law. The Law, we find out later, was meant to bring us to Christ. Bring us to a place of understanding that I can't keep God's righteous requirements perfectly. They should have figured that out because along with the Law God gave them a sacrificial system, the means by which they would be forgiven when they messed up. In other words, God was saying, here's the Law, but you're going to mess up.

I'm also going to give you a sacrificial system so that we can work this thing out and continue to have a relationship. Somehow, some way they lost sight of that, and they started to think that the law was the means by which they would be

saved and be ushered into eternity. That's what they were building. That wasn't God's building.

God was building a completely different structure with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone, but they rejected Him. And of course, every time Jesus talked, they accused Him of doing away with the Law because of the way He spoke, and that's one of the reasons why Jesus said what he did in verse 17. Look with me there, He said,

“It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void.”

We've talked about this before. Jesus made this statement before and people look at it and they say, see, it says it right there. We're still under the Law. Not one single jot of the Law has passed away. See, we're still under. It's not what Jesus meant. He said the Law will not pass away because the Law is a reflection of God's character and holiness, and God's character and holiness aren't going anywhere. So how can the law go anywhere?

You see, the Law will always be the Law. What Jesus did was He brought a new dynamic into play by dying for us on the cross, sending the Holy Spirit, who is the Law Giver, into our hearts to create a completely new relationship to the Law.

Did you ever wonder why the Law was given in the Old Testament on stone tablets? Hard stone tablets. That's a picture of our relationship to the Law prior to Jesus Christ and the coming of the Spirit. The Law is this hard, rigid, external thing that speaks from outside of you saying, don't do this. Don't do that. Don't do this. Don't do that. But after Jesus' death on the cross and the sending of the Holy Spirit to come indwell believers, the Law Giver took up residence.

And now it's no longer this external voice saying, don't do that. It's an internal voice of the Spirit which merges with my own heart. It's a joining of hearts between God and the believer, and it's no longer, thou shalt not commit adultery. It's like, I would never do that against my wife. I would never do that against you, Lord.

You see, it's this coming together of the heart of the believer and the heart of the Law to make this beautiful picture of desire, to desire the things of God apart from the rigidity and the externality and the coldness of the Law, the external Law.

Well, that's what God was doing and it's cool. It's marvelous. But it wasn't what the Pharisees were doing, so they rejected the cornerstone, rejected Him out of hand. And then He goes on in verse 18. I want you to notice this. And He says,

“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

And you read verse 18 and you're huh? I wonder what that's doing in there. I mean, it almost looks like a cut and paste job, doesn't it? It's like He was just talking to the Pharisees about how the Law is never going to pass away and then He throws out this statement about marriage, divorce and remarriage. And you're huh? I guess that page got lost or something. But no, actually what Jesus is doing is He's speaking to the Pharisees, to the religious leaders who, by the way, had really messed with God's moral law as it relates to marriage.

And he's saying exactly what He just got done saying. That God's moral law isn't going anywhere. And specifically, as it relates to marriage, He says, God's intention for marriage, his desire for marriage and the things that go along with it related to divorce and remarriage are just as foundational and established as they ever were, and they will continue to be so. And that basically tells us that just because there's a new dynamic coming into play through Jesus and the preaching of the Kingdom and the relationship of the believer to the Law doesn't mean that the Law is simply now going to go up and be rewritten as it relates to the moral guidelines of the Law.

The moral aspects of the Law are still as sure and foundational as they ever were. People say that to me all, well not all the time, but I get it pretty often. Not so much from people here in our fellowship, but when I get email and stuff from people hear me talking about the Law. And the legalists love to write me nasty letters and say things like, so you're saying that we can just go out and murder people then?

It's like, what? No, don't you, do you guys understand the difference between the moral Law and the ceremonial Law? There's a big difference. Jesus fulfilled the ceremonies of the Law. He is the fulfillment of those things. The moral aspects of the law that's the holiness of God. It doesn't change. It doesn't change anything, right? You got to understand that. And so, He raises this one issue about marriage, divorce and remarriage to show that this is all still very much in force.

And I'm not going to talk a lot about what He says here in this verse about marriage, divorce and remarriage because we've covered it a lot in the past, but

I'm aware of the fact that some of you may, this might be something you really would like to hear about because maybe it's a, it's just a current issue for you or someone you know. So can I just encourage you to take a little note, go to our website at ccontario.com. Go to the, [Through the Bible](#) page, and then go to [Matthew](#). We are studying Matthew.

Scroll down to chapter 5 and you'll see some messages there about when Jesus taught on marriage, divorce and remarriage, and you should be able to find pretty much, all you're everything you're looking for, and if you have any questions beyond that, just shoot me a note and we'll work it through. The final section of this chapter covers something that we've spoken about several times before, but we now come to it here.

And Jesus is telling a story here. This is not a parable. Do you understand the difference? I mean, a parable is a story, but a parable is something that is made up to communicate a truth. A story is potentially a very real event, and the way we know parables from stories is that stories often have proper names that are given to them. Parables do not. For example, in the parable of the prodigal son, which we covered last week, it was the father, the son, the older son, the servant. No names were given.

In this particular story, proper names are given. We're going to see the name of Lazarus, not to be confused with the man that Jesus raised from the dead, but a different man. And then we're also going to see Abraham, operates in this story as well, and his proper name is given as well. Let's read it. Verse 19,

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.”

Now stop there for a moment. This term, “*Abraham's side,*” your Bible, if you have an older translation, may say, “*Abraham's bosom.*” And this is another name for paradise. This is where people were taken prior to Jesus paying the price for our sins on the cross. You do know that people didn't go to heaven before the cross, right? The way to heaven wasn't open because the price had not been paid. We're told in the Scripture that God left the sins committed before the cross unpunished.

It doesn't mean God didn't forgive people. He did. He forgave people in the Old Testament when they cried out and asked for forgiveness, but their sins weren't

punished. God did not punish them for their sins. He forgave them and nobody got punished. You say, well, wait a minute, a bunch of animals died. Yeah, but the blood of goats and bulls and animals can't pay for the price of the sin of man.

That was just a picture of sacrificial bloodshed, which God was preparing them for to show that there must be another sacrifice. One that is to come. So, this is the place where people would go. This place is called in this case, Abraham side or paradise. This is where Jesus promised the thief on the cross, this day you'll be with me in paradise. Okay? Later on they were able to go right into the presence of the Lord and that's been the case ever since Jesus died on the cross and opened the way, as Paul tells us.

It goes on to say in the middle of verse 22 that,

"...The rich man also died and was buried, (but he didn't go to paradise. It says) ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side"

In this place, this holding place if you will, prior to the cross, there is the place of paradise, and there's also this place of suffering and torment for those who died rejecting the Word of God and they could see one another from each of these places. Crazy, isn't it? It's also interesting to see in Jesus's story that this man is instantly transported to where he deserves to go. And you'll notice that you don't hear anything about a judgment.

There's no judgment given as far as some kind of an eternal judgment. That is to come. The eternal judgment is not when people find out what happened, even though our weird stories make it sound like that. Judgment is simply going to be the legal official declaration of someone's eternal destination. But you'll notice that the rich man is instantly in a place where he is suffering. And I'm not going to hang on this for terribly long because what I'm explaining to you isn't really the point of the story.

I'm bringing it up because we do get insights from this story. But what really must have raised some eyebrows about Jesus telling this story is His statement that the rich man died and ended up in Hades because remember I told you at the very beginning, the Jews assumed that a man's wealth was proof of God's approval. And so, here's Jesus saying the rich man died and ended up in Hades. And they're like, what? A rich man in Hades? Are you kidding me? Okay. It goes on in verse 24 that we find the rich man calling out,

“...Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.’”

Now I want you to stop there for just a moment and be very careful. The point of this story is not to explain how you get to heaven or why you might end up in Hades. That's not the point of the story. Don't go away thinking that the rich man was lost because he was rich and that he had good things, and the poor man went to paradise because he was poor and he had very little. That's not the point of the story. People are lost because they refuse to heed God's Word. Simple as that. Let's find out what the point of the story is. Verse 26,

“And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’²⁷ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’²⁹ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’”

You'll notice that the rich man, he knew that his family would not heed the Word of God. He knew it. When Abraham said, hey, they've got the Word of God, let him pay attention to the Word of God. He immediately says, no, that's not going to be enough, but if you send Lazarus back and they know that this is a man back from the grave, that will get their attention. Look what Abraham says. Verse 31.

“He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Isn't that amazing? Do we know that that is, in fact, the case? Yes, we sure do. That's exactly what happened. Jesus is talking about Himself. He is basically prophesying that when I rise from the dead, they will not believe because they would not heed the Word of God, and even if someone rises from the dead, and I'm going to, they still won't believe. I found a quote from one of my favorite authors, Harry Ironside, who's with the Lord. He's in the real heaven. He wrote,

“The man who refuses to heed the clear, definite instructions of the Holy Scriptures would never believe, though one came to him asserting that he had been on the other side of the tomb and had returned to warn him to flee from the wrath to come.” – H.A. Ironside

“The man who refuses to heed the clear, definite instructions of the Holy Scriptures would never believe, though one came to him asserting that he had been on the other side of the tomb and had returned to warn him to flee from the wrath to come.”

Somebody might say, well, no, wait a minute here, pastor Paul I know somebody who saw a miracle and they came to the Lord. Yeah, that's possible. It's because that's the person who did heed the Word of God and would heed the Word of God. The point is, if you're dealing with someone who would just refuse to hear what the Word of God has to say anyway, they're not going to believe a miracle either.

If you're praying for somebody who refuses to heed God's Word, that God would bring a miracle into their life so they'd come to Him you may be wasting your time. Rather, I think you probably should be asking God to do a work in their heart that they might, that God, would prepare them to hear His voice, right? To be open to what He's saying about the truth of their situation and the truth of His word, amen? Let's stand together.