

Sermon
Lanier Christian Church
March 7, 2010

Managing Your Earthly Treasure – Advice from Jesus Luke 16:1-18

INTRODUCTION

The corruption and scandals in our country revolving around our sinking economy are bothersome to all of us. It seems like not a week goes by that we do not learn of more corruption in our government involving money.

It is interesting, then, that Jesus told an unusual parable about a dishonest manager...a crooked manager. It's a story about an employee who "cooked the books" for his employer. He used dishonest methods to give an accounting of his company's assets.

It's a parable about money, which shouldn't be surprising because of the 38 parables Jesus told, 19 of them dealt with handling possessions.

Jesus talked about Money 16 out of 38 parables; 1 out of 10 verses in the Gospels. The Bible devotes 500 verses on prayer; less than 500 verses on faith; but over 2,000 verses on money and possessions.

Since Jesus had so much to say about it, we'd better pay attention. I hope you know you can trust God—but when it comes to handling God's money, how much can he trust you? First, we will consider:

THE PARABLE: THE GOOD EXAMPLE OF A CROOK (1-8)

Let's just read the parable beginning in Luke 16:1:

Jesus told his disciples, "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' The manager said to himself, 'What will I do now? My master is taking

away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg—I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. The manager told him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' The Master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light."

The "moral of the story" is found in the last sentence and it's the key to understanding the parable. The manager was a cunning, conniving, dishonest rascal—but you can't help but smile at how shrewd he was. When he learned he was about to lose his job (because he was dishonest and wasteful), he decided to do something that would help himself in the end.

Why was this foolish steward commended after he had just been told he was fired? He wasn't commended for being dishonest, he wasn't commended for wasting months and maybe years of the master's time and resources, He was commended for the fact that once he realized there was a problem, He immediately took action to fix it.

Now this is very important. Because some of us today may be thinking, "I'm sure God has given me gifts that I don't use for His Kingdom, I'm sure that I'm not really using my time for the Lord, I'm positive that I haven't settled this issue of who owns what concerning my possessions and my money, and maybe you're sitting there today struggling with this and saying, "Wow, maybe I'm a foolish steward?"

Here's the Good News! The good news is that God gives us a chance just like the owner gave this man a chance settle the issue, and to get the books right and the accounts right. There's a poem that goes something like this, "though I can't go back and make a brand new start my friend, anyone can start from now and make a brand new

end." And that's what we are going for.

What can we learn from the Crooked Manager? He knew he was facing a deadline; he formulated a plan, and he acted before the opportunity was gone. We are also facing a deadline. Do you have a creative plan to influence your world before that deadline? Are you letting opportunities pass by? We must learn to be wise in the ways of the world, but we must remain as innocent as doves—that's hard. In fact, like every other command in the Christian life, it's impossible without the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. That's the parable and the "moral" to the story, but Jesus is just getting started. Let's notice:

THE PRINCIPLES That Jesus taught (9-18)

Jesus used this unusual parable about a crooked man to teach us four practical principles about handling money. We know these teachings are about money because of the reaction of the Pharisees. Look down to verse 14: "The Pharisees who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus."

You may hear some Christians teach that money is evil. I disagree. Money is not immoral— it's morally neutral. It's what you do with money that determines its moral value. Money can be used to build a facility like this, or to feed the hungry, or to educate people, or to take the gospel around the world. Or money can be used to buy drugs, create pornography, or to pay someone to kill another person.

The Bible never says money is evil—it is the love of money, the craving for money that is a problem. We read in I Timothy 6:9-10, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many griefs."

Isn't that true? We all know folks who have no time for God because they are busy making the almighty dollar or spending it.

Every now and then, even the Wall Street Journal gives some sound financial advice about money. A few years ago, they ran this statement: "Money is an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider of everything except happiness."

That's what I call real financial advice. Let's get some more real financial advice from the lips of the Creator of heaven and earth—the Lord Jesus:

1. Your best investment is in people that you'll see in Heaven (vs. 9)

How have your investments been doing lately? I have a hot tip to share with you about a great investment. It's some inside information from the Creator of Heaven and Earth. This investment advice is found in verse 9: "I tell you use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

If you have a King James Version it says something about making friends with the "mammon of unrighteousness." "Mammon" was the name of the ancient Canaanite god of riches. Jesus is saying we need to be clever in using our money so the end result will be seeing people in heaven. You can't buy your salvation or anyone else's salvation, and you can't buy true friends. But notice how the crooked manager used his discounts to influence his customers so they would receive him favorably after he lost his job. In the same way, we should be using our money to influence people for Christ. Obviously the best way to do that is when you give your money to reach others for Christ

Those faithful Christians who gave their offerings to Hardwick Christian Church when I was growing up made an investment that affected people like me. Those faithful Christians who gave to Woodland Christian Camp made an investment that affected people like me and brought me closer to Christ.

Jesus said one day your money will be gone, and you'll be gone from your money. So while you have an opportunity, use your money to influence caused that bring people closer to Christ so when you are living in the eternal dwellings (heaven) there will be friends there to welcome you. I'll come back to this verse at the end of the message. Next:

2. Your management of God's money determines if He can trust you with true riches (vs. 10-12)

The next financial principle is expressed in verses 10-12. Jesus said, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

Jesus mentions two kinds of wealth. First, there is "worldly wealth." That's the money God gives each of us. You must remember all the wealth in the world belongs to God. He owns all the diamonds, all the gold, and all the oil wells. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and He owns the hills as well.

God gives us wealth so we can buy the basics to meet our needs. We use money to buy food, clothing and shelter. Also, He gives us wealth so we can enjoy things that go beyond the basic necessities. This is bonus wealth. God has promised He will meet our needs—but He never promised to meet our wants. When I speak of a "wealthy person" who do you envision? You probably think of some billionaire like Bill Gates, or at least a millionaire, but you don't think of yourself as wealthy. If you have money in your pocket to buy lunch, and you have indoor plumbing and you drove your own car to church, you are wealthier than 80% of the world's population. That's worldly wealth—but it came from God.

The main reason God gives us worldly wealth is to test us. He wants to see how well we manage that kind of wealth. Look again at verse

11. Jesus speaks of another kind of wealth. He calls it "true riches." If you are trustworthy with a little, God knows you can be trusted with a lot. If you prove to be trustworthy with worldly wealth, God can trust you with true riches. True riches have nothing to do with money. They include spiritual blessings like peace, security, and strength that are so valuable they can't be bought at any price.

Are you managing God's money wisely? The first question is: Are you returning a tithe of it to the Lord? It all belongs to the Lord, but He requires we give Him back 10% to demonstrate we trust Him. Sometimes people say, "If I was making a \$1 million a year, I'd be happy to give God 10% of it." Well, if you aren't tithing on your \$30,000, what makes you think God will trust you with a million dollars? It's not about tithing; it's about trusting. Do you believe God can be trusted when He speaks in Malachi 3:10? He says, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing so great you won't be able to contain it." Now, if you think God is a liar, don't trust Him with a tithe. Or if you don't think He has the ability to do what He says He'll do—don't trust Him with a tithe. But if you think God is trustworthy, go ahead and start trusting Him by returning 10% of your income to Him. But truthfully, as we learned last week...he owns it all. All your money. All your land. All your possessions.

Too many Christians give God a dollar here and a dollar there. Another problem is many Christians give God their "leftovers" instead of their "firstfruits." You pay all your other bills and if you have anything left over, you give some of it to God. God can't have first place in your life if you are giving Him last place in your checkbook!

The real issue is not whether God is trustworthy—it's whether or not we are trustworthy in managing God's money. Can God trust you with more than you are managing right now?

3. Money is a great servant but a terrible master (vs. 13)

Jesus shares a great financial principle in verse 13. He says, "No

servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Again, it's that word "Mammon" the pagan god of riches. In America, some people have made money their god as well. Six and seven days a week they worship at the altar of the almighty dollar. Professor Howard Hendrix relates the story of visiting in the home of a wealthy Christian man from a wealthy family in Boston. He was impressed with the man's humility and down-to-earth attitude. Dr. Hendrix asked him how he could grow up in such wealth and not be consumed by materialism. The man replied, "My father taught us that everything in our home was either a tool or an idol. The choice was ours."

Some of you are old enough to remember comedian Jack Benny. He was known as a tightwad who hated to spend his money. In the old comedy routine, Jack Benny was held up by a robber. The mugger pointed a gun at Jack and said, "Come on, hand it over. Your money or your life!" Jack rubbed his chin and said, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking!" In the same way God is saying to each of us today, "Worship and serve Me or Serve Money—which will it be." And we stand there, "I'm thinking. I'm thinking!"

How important is money to you? Several years ago, people were asked what they would be willing to do for \$10 million. The results were tabulated in a book entitled *The Day America Told the Truth*. 25% said they would totally abandon their family. 23% said they would become a prostitute for a week. 16% indicated they would leave their spouse. 3% said they would put their children up for adoption. Money is a terrible master. It will make you become something you are not.

4. Money is temporary but God's Word never expires (vs. 14-15)

Let's pick up with verse 14: The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the

ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

These Pharisees were making a mockery of the Law of God. They claimed to love God but in reality they loved money and the trappings of money more.

Now, let's back away and see what Jesus is saying. In verse 9 Jesus said one day money will be gone, and it will. When you die, worldly riches will cease to exist for you. We often say that someone died a Millionaire. But in truth, when even a millionaire dies they leave with nothing financially. We bring nothing into this world, and we take nothing out with us. You've never seen a U-Haul in a funeral procession.

Some have tried though. The Egyptians thought their rulers could take their possessions into the afterlife, but as we all know, archaeologists have uncovered these items and they're still here.

Money is only temporary, but the Word of God lasts forever—it never expires. Have you noticed food and drugs have an expiration date? It's sometimes called a "use before" date. The Word of God has no expiration date—but it does have a use before date—use it before you die or before Jesus returns. After that date, it won't benefit you.

"You can't take it with you...but you can send it on ahead." That's what Jesus is talking about. That's what He means by laying up treasures in heaven. Jesus said we should invest our money in people because people have eternal souls and can go to heaven. But Jesus is pointing out there is something else that is eternal—the Word of God. There are only two eternal things we deal with in this world—the souls of men and women, and the Word of God. So that's where we should be investing our money.

In I Timothy 6:17-19 God says, "Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage—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."

(The Message)

Look again at verse 9. Are you investing your money in ways so that when you get to heaven there will be people there to greet you because of your gifts? Will there be some people there because of how you lived, what you said, and how you gave your money? When you are giving to God, you may not even realize how far your money is reaching with the good news.

I love the song by Ray Boltz entitled "Thank You." It starts out with him having a dream of being in heaven, and you are standing beside him. Someone walks up and says, "Friend, you may not know me," then he said, "but wait—you used to teach my Sunday School when I was only eight. Every week you would say a prayer, before the class would start. One day when you said that prayer, I asked Jesus in my heart." Then in the second verse Ray sings, "Then another man stood before you; He said, 'Remember the time? A missionary came to church, His pictures made you cry. You didn't have much money— But you gave it anyway. Jesus took that gift you gave, And that's why I'm in heaven today!' Thank you for giving to the Lord. For I am a life that was changed. Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am so glad you gave."

I encourage you to manage God's resources in a way so when you arrive in heaven, there will be people there who will say, "Thank you for giving to the Lord."

Outline from D.Dykes/ Additions by D.Simpson

Luke 16

¹Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ²So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

³"The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg— ⁴I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

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⁶" 'Eight hundred gallons^[a] of olive oil,' he replied.

"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'

⁷"Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

" 'A thousand bushels^[b] of wheat,' he replied.

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⁸"The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

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