

I had to make a decision going into today that today was either going to be very, very long or I could shorten it and take what I wanted to do in one week and push it to two weeks. And I decided to push it to two weeks. So we'll start with this, and then we'll finish with it next weekend. I'm glad to be in this text when we get to it. And what I mean by that is the gospel of Luke has over and over again addressed money and resources, and I've always come across it and I've always felt like I had to be real gentle with it because we were raising funds for a building. And the worst possible scenario would be for Jesus, through His word, to go after your heart, after your joy, after your mind, after the fullness of your life and because of where we are in the history of this church, you hear that through the filter of, "Oh okay, I'll give to the building." That would have been a loss. So every time we've hit it, I've just gingerly been obedient to the text, but I haven't pressed. But that's behind us now. That's done, and so I can just get after this like I think Jesus is getting after this.

So let's get into this. When Jesus talks, it is important to take note of certain things, anytime that Jesus begins to speak and teach the Scriptures. One of the things I think you need to look at right out of the gate is who He's talking to and who else might be there. Because those two will often play into how and why He's saying what He's saying. So there's two groups listening to what He's about to say, so I want to point that out to you before we get into what can be a very confusing parable if you try to read too much into it. Let's go to Luke 16, starting in verse 1. "He also said to the disciples,..." So the first group that's there is the group that's following Him. Then if we begin to read this text here, we would just think, "Okay, that's the only group that's there." Except if you look down in verse 14, you'll see that there was someone eavesdropping. Like have you ever been in a conversation at dinner and just had someone random join the conversation? That's what's about to happen here, where He's teaching His disciples but there's another group that's within earshot and they're listening. Look at verse 14, "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him." So He's teaching those disciples who are following Him. A couple of weeks ago, at the end of Luke 15 I said, "Now He's closing the door." He's not going to address Israel much anymore at all. He's going to turn His attention away from pleading with all of Israel to join Him, and now He's just going to teach His disciples. And so now He's turned his focus to His disciples, those who are following Him, but the Pharisees are still following along. And they just heard what Jesus taught and they ridicule Him. So the disciples were there, but the Pharisees who were "lovers of money" were there.

That's our crowd. So let's get into our parable. On the surface, this really is a confusing parable that you could use to justify your wickedness if you wanted to, but then I would call you out and it would be church discipline, it would be horrible. Let's just go. "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.' 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.' This guy's white collar as could be, and he just got fired. Now it's not "Get out right now," it's "Put everything in order, bring it to me and then you're done." And he goes, "What am I going to do? How am I going to take care of my family? How are we going to eat? Where are we going to live? What am I going to do from here, because I'm frail and can't dig, and I'm too proud to beg?" So let's finish this parable up. Verse 4, "I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses." So he's going, "Where am I going to live? How am I going to survive? How's my family going to eat? What are we going to do here?" And then he hatches this plan. And in verse 5

we pick up the plan. "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.'" So let me explain how much this guy owes. A hundred measures of oil would have been the amount of oil you could have pressed out of 150 Olive Trees. It would have been about two to three years salary of an average worker in this time period. This is a significant debt. Now look at the manager's response. "He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'" He cut his debt in half. So look at the next one. The next one is a lot bigger. "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.'" A hundred measures of wheat would have taken about a hundred acres of land to produce and is worth about ten years salary of the average worker. That's how much this cat owes. So once again, this is a very significant debt. "He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'" So he doesn't cut it in half, but that's pretty significant.

Now look at verse 8. This is where it gets so confusing to people who want to read too much into this. "The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness." That's where this parable can get goofy. Because this guy is shady, shady as all get out. He goes, "Where am I going to live? Where am I going to stay? How am I going to get food to feed my family? How am I going to do this?" And the hatches this plan of cutting these debts, so when he's kicked out, he can then go knock on the door and go, "Remember when I saved you five years of salary? Can I stay with you?" That's this guy's plan. "Remember when I cut your debt in half, when I kept you out of prison, when I kept your home from being foreclosed on? Do you remember when I did that? I'm staying with you for a couple of years." That's his plan, and the master catches wind of it and he goes, "Brilliant!" This is not "Great job! Go and do likewise." If you've ever been bested by an opponent in any type of competition where they just had a move or did something that surprised you and you were just amazed. It was shady, but amazing. That's what just happened. The master sees his shrewdness and goes, "This guy might be legit. I might have to reconsider. This guy's good." So he's not commanding him as if what he did was right. I tried to break this thing down and look how it has been viewed historically. Everyone wants to dig real deep in history and go, "Oh, what's really going on here is he's taking off his cut." The problem is that it doesn't add up. His cut would have been much less than that. So then there are those who go, "No, he marked it up even beyond what he was supposed to." I'm just telling you if you try to play with it like that, the math just doesn't add up. That's not what's going on here. He's commanding him for his shrewdness for how he went about securing a home and food and care for his family when it looked like he was going to be homeless.

Now if that's hard for you, the next line gets even more difficult. "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." This is where it really does get confusing. He just said that those outside of the light are more shrewd at what the point of this parable is than the children of light, and it shouldn't be so. So here's what we've got to unpack. What's the point of the parable? Parables teach one lesson. If you take a parable and try to squeeze the life out of it, you can get yourself in a lot of trouble because a parable teaches one lesson, not 47 messages. It teaches a lesson. So the question we've got to answer for ourselves is: What is the lesson? I think the next few verses will help us out. Verse 9, "And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth..." Does that sound like Jesus? "Here's what you do, you make friends for yourselves with your unrighteous wealth." The word "unrighteous" here can literally be translated, "untrue." The Scriptures are going to define wealth, true riches, very differently than you having capital. So He says here, "With your cash make friends." That didn't help us at all, did it? If you look at who my friends are, there are very similar personality traits among who I like and don't like. Let's do this first. Can we agree that there are just certain people we don't like and that we're just not going to like them? If I can't, then we've got to go to a different text. Now listen, one day we'll all be in heaven and the sin in their life that makes us not like them will be removed from them and it will be okay. I'm not saying we don't love them. I'm not saying we don't serve them. I'm not saying we don't die to ourselves by outdoing them in honor. I'm just saying we don't like them. Like on Friday night when we're really wanting to recharge and hang, we don't call them. I'm not saying hate, I'm not saying dislike, I'm just saying not your preference. If you look at who I'm drawn to for deep friendships, there's some markers in them. They're almost all passionate, maybe not about the same

things I am. They almost all have the gift of discernment, they're thinkers, they're able to have robust dialogue. I like an exchange of ideas. I love dinner table, good food, good drink and strong words. Not an argument. I'm not looking to argue. I don't want to fight...at least not all the time. I love just an exchange of ideas. A good friend of mine and I sat down last week and just said, "Is the gospel of the kingdom, as well as spiritual, is it also social and material?" And so we sat around and talked about whether or not the gospel of the kingdom was yes spiritual, yes justification, yes cross alone, but whether that creates a social and material kingdom also. The people I'm drawn to for deep friendships are thinkers and they tend to have some sort of spiritual bent. That's just who I'm kind of drawn to in regards to deep friendships. Now I've got friends that don't fit that mold, but my inner circle, my kind of crew has that bent, that's who they are. What He's saying by "make friends" is not to buy off friends but to have with your money a generous spirit that people are drawn to, that they see and go, "That's an amazing characteristic of this guy. He blesses." Jesus has just taken it from "Give alms to the poor" and He's rolled out and goes, "No, it's more than that. It's more than just alms to the poor, it's generosity. It's generosity in all things. It's generosity with your money, it's generosity with your home, it's generosity with your stuff, it's generosity with your time. Make friends with your unrighteous wealth, with your cash."

And it's not so that they would give to you in return, but look at the reason why. "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." When what fails? Your cash. Notice He didn't say, "if it fails." No, He said "when." So unrighteous wealth, cash fails us in one of three ways. It disappears. I think everyone I know has had the moment where they look back on three or four years and they look at what they made and are like, "What did we spend that on?" Or it disappears when the stock market drops like 900 points or we lose our job or something like that happens. So that's one way it fails us. Or another way is we get so much of it we can do anything we want. And that's where you get the book of Ecclesiastes where he says, "I drank pleasure until there wasn't anything else to drink and it brought me no joy. I bought houses until there weren't any bigger houses to buy and I got bored. I had women until there wasn't a type I hadn't had and it got boring. There's not a pleasure I have not maxed out and I'm lonely and empty and frustrated. So it fails us that way also. The truth is few of us will feel these two extremes. So the third way is how it fails most of middle class America. You're going to die, and then who cares? You can't buy into heaven. You can't go, "Hey Peter, I got something for you. "...so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." He's talking about this next life, not this temporary one. He's talking about heaven, He's talking about forever, He's talking about being received warmly by those we were generous to while we were here.

Now this next section is going to help us understand the full parable. So let's look in verse 10, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much,..." This is absolutely true. If you lie your way to get to the top in some sort of illusion that once you get to the top you won't have to do that anymore, you've just fooled yourself. If you struggle with debt and foolish spending making \$40K a year, you'll do the exact same with \$400K a year. You are what you are. If you're a bad manager, it doesn't matter what you have to manage, you'll manage it poorly. If you're lazy, it doesn't matter what position or where you live or work, you'll be lazy. Whatever you do with a little, you'll do with much. Let's keep reading. "...and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?" So let's go back to the parable. The parable is a man became aware of his future. Most of us are not aware of our future, correct? Most of us have no idea what Thursday holds. It's an educated guess at best. We don't know the future. Most of us aren't sitting here going, "In two weeks I'll get fired, a week later my house will foreclosed on and then I'm going to be on the streets. Most of us don't get that information. The manager got that information of what was about to occur. And so with that future in mind, he began to live, began to prepare and began to plan for that day of reckoning. And the master said, "Shrewd and brilliant. And I wish the children of light would live that way." He's saying here that most of His children live as though there's not going to be a day where they stand in front of Him and give an account for all that He trusted them with.

So let's run through what that is. For instance, what have I been entrusted with? This physical body is His. He can take it when He wants, right? I mean, I can do Pilates, I can take spinach, I can take vitamins, but I could also just go for a jog towards my car tonight to avoid the cold and have my heart stop. But it's mine to steward. So I've been given this body by God for the glory of God and must now steward it for that end. I've been given a wife, a very attractive, brilliant woman who God blinded the eyes of for about nine months until she entered a covenant with me, and it's a gift. I've been given a wife, and in the Scriptures God has commanded me to wash her in the water of the word, to lead her, to love her and to walk with her in such a way that she becomes what the Bible would call "a fruitful vine." So I've been given a wife. I will be held accountable for how I stewarded the gift of the wife. I've been given babies: a daughter who will turn six in February, a little boy who just turned three in November and we've got one on the way that will be due in June. So that's our little family unit. These have been given to me, not just to mow the lawn although they are going to mow the lawn. Not just to clean the house, but they're going to clean the house. I haven't been given worker bees, I've been given children. And as their steward I've been given the responsibility to impart to them the glory of God, the wonder of God, the might of God, the beauty of God. It's my responsibility to impart to them worshiping hearts. I've been given a house, two cars, a little bit of cash, a little bit of unrighteous wealth if you will. I've been given this church to lead these are things that God has said, "I am going to trust you with these things. You are to steward them." And according to the Scriptures, there's going to be a day where the facade and all of the shadows disappear in the brilliance of His coming and you and I will be bare and naked and give an account for how we steward what is God's for God's glory. And Jesus is saying, "Why is it that the world can figure this out about their short lives, but My children can't seem to get this?" Now, who do you think He's talking to right now? Remember verse 14. Why is it that the children of light aren't as shrewd as the children of darkness? Here's what He means by "shrewd." This guy in the parable, he's doing everything he can to provide, to care for, with violence, with shadiness, he's losing sleep, he's working a plan. He's doing all these things because he knows this is coming. And Jesus is going, "Man, My children would live so different if they remembered how this ends."

And then He closes it with this really beautiful verse. "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. You cannot serve God and money." I love that this verse is here because it allows us to combat a wildly popular idea, specifically in the West. The idea is that God is somehow magnified and glorified when you're wealthy, when you have a big house, nice cars and nice stuff and give glory to His name because of those things. I'm not telling you there's anything wrong with having those things, but if your pursuit is those things so that God might be glorified, you're off. You're really not chasing anything different from what the world's chasing, you're just trying to attach Jesus' name to it. You can't serve them both. You can't. You can't chase one without forsaking the other. And this goes both ways. There are going to be instances where to say yes to an opportunity would be disobedient before the Lord, and there's going to be times that you're going to lose out on financial gain because God is your number one. If it's happened to me, it's absolutely happened to you in the business world. So He's going, "You can only have one number one. You can only have one real pursuit. And He's pushing here: What is it? Because one day what it really is is going to get exposed. There are two examples that He gives in the next couple of chapters. You've got Lazarus and the rich man as one example. That would be the negative example of living this way. And then in Luke 19, there's the story of Zacchaeus. So you've got these two examples, one's the positive of what happens when the gospel penetrates the heart – open handed living, "I'll give half of what I own to the poor, and if I've wronged anyone, I'll give even more." This is that generosity that begins to happen.

Okay, I need to be very careful here because I don't want you to take what I'm about to say and make it seasonal. For the next month here, can we just be careful and not lose our minds? Let me unpack this just for a second. Last Friday my wife and daughter were out of town, and it was just my son and me. I was teaching at a conference here in town. I finished up, came home and got my boy and we went out and ate meat. No spinach. He wanted some apples, I spanked him. Meat, red meat. And we ate the red meat, and then we drove over to Super Wal-Mart, went in and got some Duncan Donuts and we ate donuts until we were just nauseous. And then we went over into the toy section, walked up to the

Nerf gun section and I said, "Choose wisely, my friend." But he didn't and he picked the one with the one shot deal, and I grabbed the one that has like a belt-fed mechanism. And we went to the house and turned off all the lights, I turned on some music and for the next hour and a half we ripped that house a new one. I mean, we dived and screamed, I shot him like 700 times, he lost his bullets very early on. This is how you teach him to make good decisions. Let me get to my point so I don't belabor this. I don't know about your kids, but mine get new stuff all the time. I'm not crazy wealthy. My kids get toys all the time. Last Friday night I got a new Nerf gun, both of us did. A week before that, he got a little airplane. My daughter is constantly getting little things. Can we just not lose our mind in the next month and celebrate the glory of God in the incarnation by being dumb with how we spend? Can we maybe just pull back on the craziness of this stuff and maybe take the money that we would have used there and do something generous, beautiful, loving with it? And I'm not saying don't buy your kids stuff. Please, buy your kids stuff. I'm just saying don't lose your mind. I'll give you a perfect easy thing. On your way out there's a table in our foyer for our Angel Tree deal that we do with Communities in Schools with at-risk kids who I guarantee you don't get a Nerf gun on Friday night to play with his dad if he's even there. Can we take one of those things out there and just be generous like that? How easy is that? How small is that?

And I've even been wary about even going into this because the worst thing that could happen is for you to go, "Yeah, we probably need to be smarter about Christmas." No, we need to be smarter about everything. Like how you're treating your physical body right now. God gave that to you for His glory. If you're not taking care of it to the point you're always exhausted and there's no vitality in you, that's just as sinful and wicked and just as bad stewardship as you blowing your money on something else. Your wife, your children, your husband, your home, do you see through the lenses of "There will be a day where I stand in front of God and give an account?" Because it's coming. Grace? Yes. I'm not saying you're going to hell. Don't hear me saying that. I'm just saying it's going to be a real uncomfortable day at first. This is an area that I pray and I pray and I pray about. Because if we're going to be countercultural, it doesn't look like the dumb t-shirts we're making and it doesn't just look like fish on the back of our car and it doesn't just look like voting Republican. It means we live counterculturally when it comes to money, when it comes to power and when it comes to sex. We're generous with our money. We don't hoard, we don't get selfish, we don't abuse people to get more.

We use our power for good, for the good of mankind, for the glory of God. We're not timid and afraid of sex like it's this thing that can kill us, but we're not so loose over here. We use it as God designed it to be. This is our counterculture, not bumper stickers, not even music. This is our counterculture. So I'm praying for it. I'm begging God, "Loosen up our hands." Because if Jesus doesn't command anything except for trying to bring you into joy and have His name exalted, then God saying, "Consider this...consider this...look at this...look at this..." isn't just about. . .Like Jesus never took up an offering. I'm not about to pass the plate nor have I said take all that money and give it to the church. You didn't hear me say that. But you have nothing that God would consider yours. Everything you have God views as His entrusted to you.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women. I do pray that You would help or hearts. I pray for maybe the men and women in here who have been great stewards with their cash, very generous with their cash, but maybe the stewardship failure has been in their relationship with their wife, their relationship with their children. Maybe it's their physical body they haven't stewarded well. I thank You for conviction. I thank You that You lay deep and hard on our hearts because You love us. The absence of conviction is the absence of love. And so I thank You that You would weigh on us and show us this is something we need to surrender to You, this is something we need to repent of, this is something we need to lay at your feet so that the fullness of life might be ours for the glory of Your name. So help us, Father. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."