

One of the reasons I preach through books of the Bible is that it helps us be shaped by all of God's word. Not just the parts we naturally gravitate towards or like the best. It forces us to examine difficult topics and difficult passages that we might not want to face. And I do larger sections so that we don't lose the forest for the trees nor take too long in a book. At times this means we have to wrestle with hard passages and today we have three of them. Jesus teaches the most difficult to understand parable, gives a quick harsh statement on divorce and remarriage, then tells another strange parable about heaven and hell, and all of these seem to imply that having money is dangerous and evil.

This morning I am going to try and explain what all of those mean. I want to do it without apologizing, sanitizing, or trying to explain away Jesus' words. My fear is that most of the time we say Jesus words are so hard to understand, not because they are confusing, but because we don't like what He is saying. I think a lot of Christ's words are fairly clear, we just do not like them. This morning, I want us to try and hear Jesus words. And I want to dare to ask ourselves if maybe Jesus actually meant what He said.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 16. We will read it all at once so we can get the brunt of Jesus' words, then we will try to understand it.

Point 1: Live righteously with fading wealth (v. 1-13).

Most scholars agree that this is the most difficult to understand parable in the entire Bible.

The primary difficulty is that the good guy.

The person we are supposed to imitate is a dishonest manager or steward. And the lesson itself

The point of the parable is offensive as well.

It seems to tell us that all money is unrighteous, but we should use it for the kingdom of God.

Let's take a closer look at the parable.

Verse 1, **"He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions."**

A rich man has a steward in charge of his stuff.
And he finds out that this manager has been wasting his money.
This word for wasting is the same one used to describe the younger son in our parable last week.
The one who asks for his inheritance early and then wastes it all on prostitutes and drinking.

Verse 2, **"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.'"**

The rich man confronts his manager.
He tells him to turn over the books so that he can inspect them.
And he tells him to clear out his desk because he is being fired.

And the manager doesn't know what to do.

Verse 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.'"**

He does not want to beg in the street.
His chances of being a manager somewhere else are ruined.
And he is not equipped to do manual labor.
He has to come up with a plan to keep himself out of poverty.

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 comes up with a plan.
And his plan is to use his master's money to his advantage.
Until he gets fired and doesn't have access to it anymore.

Verse 5, **"So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'"**

What he decides to do is this.

He calls in the people who owe his master money.

One by one they come in.

He asks them what they owe, and then he lowers their debt.

If they owed 100, now they only owe 50.

Another one who owes 100, now they only owe 80.

He does not totally forgive the debt because that wouldn't work.

But he can make it a lot lower.

And he does this **so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses."**

Now people will be happy with him.

They will be deeply grateful because of how he has treated them.

And when he no longer has a home, he has plenty of people willing to take him in.

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."**

The master discovers the scheme.

But instead of being angry he is impressed.

And he is trapped.

Because the master was probably charging high interest rates on his loans. Which according to God's commands is a sin.

So likely, the dishonest manager was forgiving the interest on the loans.

And the master can't go back on his alleged repentance.

Or at the very least everyone in town now thinks he is super generous.

And he doesn't want to go back on it.

But what about the second half?

"For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light."

Jesus says that the unrighteous and unsaved are smarter with how they live than the righteous.

They are more intentional with their wealth than the saved.

Then in verse 9 Jesus tells us that we should be like this manager.

Verse 9, **"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."**

Why does Jesus do this?

Why does He tell us to be like an embezzling thief?

It might be helpful to think of a mobster or heist story.

Something like the Sopranos or Oceans 11.

I love these kinds of stories.

I love watching the elaborate plan come together to rob the casino.

Now we enjoy watching these kinds of stories and cheering on the protagonist.

Not because we think being a thief or mobster is honorable.

But because its a good story and we can learn from it.

That is what Jesus is doing here.

This man used his limited time and the sinful money his master stole through high interest rates to secure his future and gave back to those in debt in the process.

This does not mean go work for the mob or evil people.

But Jesus does say to be smart with our money.

He doesn't mean invest it in the stock market.

He means we should invest it in the kingdom and its people.

We should spend our money like it is evil and we don't want it sitting in our bank accounts.

We should give it away as if we are about to lose it all.
The illustration is someone who is about to be fired.
They need to do something to secure their future.

This story is actually eschatological.
It points us to our deaths and to Christ's return.
We are going to die and all our money will fade away.
You cannot take it with you.
So, spend it now in a way to secure your future.
Purchase an eternal home for yourself.

Verse 10, **"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."**

We have to be faithful with the riches God has extracted to us.
We should not squander it and waste it in ourselves and our own selfish pursuits.
We should spend it with eternity in mind.
We should give it to those in need.
We should be faithful.
Because if you cannot be faithful and honor God with the little He has given now, why would He bless you with more?

Verse 11, **"If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"**

It seems like Jesus is saying all of our money is unrighteous.
And when His cleansing fire comes it will burn away all sin, death, and unrighteousness.
And all our wealth, all the money in the world will burn to ash.
If God cannot trust us with these simple pieces of paper, why would He give us true riches beyond our imagination?
If we cannot be trusted with His money, why would He give us our own?

We have to be faithful with our money.
We have to use it righteously.

Point 2: **Loving money blinds us (v. 13-18).**

Trying to follow Jesus while loving money is like trying to navigate around a major city you have never been to before while blindfolded.
It's like trying to play football with your helmet on backwards.
It is blinding.
And it makes us totally unable to follow Jesus.

Verse 13, **"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."**

These words are pretty straight forward.

We cannot serve two masters.

We only have room in our hearts for one.

This means that we cannot mostly serve Jesus and do a little side gig for money.

He requires all of our hearts.

We have to actually hate money and love only God.

The word here for money is not a normal one either.

It is the word Mammon.

It always has a negative connotation in Scripture.

It is not neutral.

Is the desire for wealth and more and more.

Verse 14, **"The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him."**

Like most of us, they don't like what Jesus says.

And they mock it.

They think it must be foolish nonsense.

Jesus is being way too uber spiritual.

But Jesus knows.

And Jesus says they don't like it because they love mammon not God.

And we do the same thing.

Do think Jesus must be saying something weird.

He must mean like obsessed or in love with money like Smaug the dragon.

Because if we are honest with ourselves.

If we really look deep in our own hearts.

Then we will probably discover that we love money too.

Verse 15, **"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."**

They are trying to justify their actions as something other than love.

We try to justify ourselves as well.

But God knows our hearts.

He knows exactly how the Pharisees feel.

He knows what is in our hearts.

And God knows that what we exalt and praise is an abomination to God.

We are impressed by those with wealth.

We exalt and love the rich.

They become a celebrities and we follow their every move.

They become our political leaders because so many idolize them.

But God is not impressed.

Then Jesus transitions to talk about the law of God.

Verse 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. 17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void."**

His main point is that God's commands have not changed.

Jesus is not changing and revolutionizing the law.

He reveals what it has always meant and always pointed to.

Throughout the Old Testament, God warns about the danger of wealth.
And they are commanded to care for the poor.
The law hasn't changed.
All of the prophets and John preached the same message.

And now Jesus has come preaching that the Kingdom of God is here.
And people are trying to force their way in.
It is like a mob trying to get squeeze in a concert first.
Picture people camping outside on a black Friday.
The crowds are following Jesus and they all want in the kingdom.
But the Pharisees just mock.
They don't want to come in.

And they have all the excuses in the world.
All the theological reasons why they don't have to obey.
They tell Jesus He needs to get with the times.

This is why Jesus says the law will not pass away.
Because God's standard of holiness does not change.
Their blindness does not affect reality.

This is when Jesus makes His statement about divorce and remarriage.
Verse 18 **"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."**

Jesus' statement is not primarily about divorce and remarriage.
He is using it as an example and an illustration.
But I don't want to skip over what Jesus says.
I will clear about what Jesus says and then we will dig into why He says it.
Jesus says that marriage is permanent.
It only ends in death.
You can get divorced, but in God's eyes marriage does not fade.
So those who get divorced and then remarried have committed adultery.
Therefore, we shouldn't get remarried after being divorced.

I know there are those of you here who are divorced.

I know there are those of you here who have been remarried after being divorced.

This verse does not mean that you are terrible sinners who can never be forgiven.

It does not mean that you should go and get divorced now.

I also do not think that this means we should never get divorced.

I have counseled and told people that they not only have Biblical reasons to get divorced, like adultery or being abused,

But I have also told them that they should get divorced.

Now, I don't want to stay here because this is not all about divorce and remarriage.

But if you want to pull me aside, or wrestle more with what the Bible says, Pull me aside and we can get together and talk more about it.

The primary point is that the Pharisees love of money has blinded them.

They have explained away God's laws and why it doesn't apply to them.

They have figured out why they can divorce their wives to marry new ones and it's fine.

They can be in love with mammon no problem.

But Jesus says no.

Marriage doesn't fade.

Our love for money doesn't fade just because we want it to pretend it doesn't exist.

It can blind us and lead us into dark places.

Money is a god that you can never please with sacrifices.

It will always demand more and it will never satisfy.

And the more you love it, the more it will lead you away from Christ.

I watched *Killers of the Flower Moon* recently.

It is based on a true story of how the Osage were treated in Oklahoma after they discovered oil on their land.

One of the main characters is a man called Ernest.

And he seems ordinary, almost sympathetic instead of wicked.

A few times throughout the movie he mentions that "he loves money."

He thinks of himself as a good christian man, but he does love money.

And that love of money leads him to a dark place.

It leads him, and many others, to rob and murder countless people.

He murders his own family and even poisons his wife.

And he is so blinded by his love for money that he doesn't even realize how evil he has become.

Our love for money does the same thing.

It will lead you to a very dark place.

And it starts subtly and quietly.

We cannot love money and Jesus.

We must only love Christ.

Point 3: **How we use our money reveals our spiritual condition (v. 19-31).**

Our last difficult passage is a story of a rich man and Lazarus.

It is unclear if this is just another parable, or if it is a real story.

I think the story has too many specific details and names to be a parable.

We have the rich man.

Verse 19, **"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day."**

It is not just that this man is rich.

We are to look at how he spends his money.

He does not give it away to anyone.

He keeps all of it to himself.

He is clothed in purple clothes.
Not because it is his favorite color, like my son Calvin.
But because purple is the most expensive color.
He uses all his money to buy the most expensive clothes.

And every single day he feasts.
Not a big dinner.
He has a feast every day.
Imagine a Thanksgiving meal for all of his meals.
More food than he could possibly need.

While this rich man meets his every desire, Lazarus has nothing.
Verse 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."**

Right outside of his door.
The gate at the end of his property there is a poor man.
And his name is Lazarus.
Him having a name is one of the reasons I think this is not just a parable.
He seems to have been laid there because he cannot move on his own.
He is paralyzed or disabled in some way.
His body is covered in sores like Job.

All he wants is just some of the leftovers.
Just one bit of the food that falls on the floor.
How many leftovers do you have from your Thanksgiving feasts?
How many leftovers do you think there would be if you had a feast at every meal?
And all of that is just getting thrown away.
The rich man will not let the poor man at his gate, who he has to know about, have a single bite.
The only one who shows any compassion to Lazarus are dogs.
Unclean animals that Jews wouldn't want to touch.
The dogs are more righteousness than the rich man.

Verse 22, **"The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side."**

So the poor man dies.

He dies right outside the place that holds his salvation.

He starves to death, but God sees him and knows his name.

When he dies he is touched by angels and taken to Abraham.

"The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side."

The rich man dies alone.

But he is not carried to Abraham.

He goes to Hades and torment.

All his abiding by the law did not save him.

Because he was not generous and did not give to the needy.

And from his place he can see Abraham and Lazarus.

He recognizes the man and even knows his name.

But now their places are reversed.

The rich man will now beg.

Verse 24, **"And he called 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.'"**

He begs for just a drop of water.

A scrap from Lazarus' table.

Just as Lazarus begged for a bite.

Verse 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.'"**

Abraham responds.

And he says the rich man is getting exactly what he deserved.

He did not live a life of faith.

Notice that Abraham calls him "child."

This means the rich man is a son of Abraham and a Jew.

He was someone who followed the law and went to synagogue.

But he did not have genuine faith.

Because if he did, then he would have shown grace to Lazarus.

Because how we treat the poor with our money reveals our true spiritual condition.

A refusal to give to the poor and in need shows we do not know Jesus.

We can have all our excuses, like the Pharisees.

We can complain.

But God knows our hearts and He judges.

We should not spend it on ourselves or on building massive church buildings.

We should give it to others. And not just those we deem worthy.

And this is important to do so now because there is no second chance after death.

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."**

Once we die there is no way out.

Your only chance to embrace faith in Jesus.

Your only hope to escape the flames and torment is while you live.

Because later it is too late.

Now what else does this teach us about heaven and hell?

I don't think this is a picture of paradise or heaven.

The righteous are waiting in what we call Abraham's bosom.

They wait there until Christ dies and is resurrected.

And when Christ died He descended to the dead to preach and proclaim their salvation has come.

And those who trusted in God's promises and had faith were taken with Christ to heaven.

But no one escaped hell and judgement after their death.

Verse 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.'"**

So the man begs for his family.

He wants someone to warn them of the judgement to come!

Warn them of what awaits them if they do not repent.

He does not want anyone else to have to endure the suffering he faces.

Inside of this request is the idea that he did not know.

If only someone had told him.

If only he was warned that hell was real.

If only he knew that mistreating the poor and hoarding his wealth would have led him here, then he would have changed.

Verse 29, **"But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'"**

Abraham says they have already been warned enough.

The law and the prophets already told them everything they needed to know.

Verse 30, **"And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'"**

The rich man has another complaint.

Maybe if God worked a great miracle.

Maybe if someone was brought back to live then they would believe.

If someone came from the dead to tell them about the afterlife, then they would listen.

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.'"**

This is where the chapter ends.

On the note that if we do need heed the warnings of the prophets, we will not listen to miracles either.

After all, the prophets have stories of the dead coming back to life.

But Israel did not listen.

The rich man did not listen.

And if you are spiritually blind, it does not matter what God does.

Jesus is God in flesh.

He works miracles in front of their faces.

But they do not listen or believe.

This last part so clearly points towards Jesus' own resurrection.

He will come back from the dead.

He came back to warn and to offer us an escape into eternal life and joy.

But the people will not believe.

After Jesus is raised, the same Pharisees who did not believe before still don't believe.

They plot further ways to stop the disciples.

All over the world there are billions of people who do not believe the man who came back from the grave.

But we must believe.

We must heed His words.

We should listen to His warnings.

Jesus came back to live to save you.

Listen to Him.

And dare to think what He said about how we treat the poor matters.

Because the way we treat them reveals what we think about Jesus.

How we use our money reveals what is in our hearts.

Look at how you use your money.

What does it say about your spiritual condition?