

Luke 16:9

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[0 : 00] If you have a Bible before you then please turn to Luke chapter 16. As you do so let me say for a moment what a delight it's been for me to be with you this weekend.

Paul and Claire have welcomed me so warmly and open heartedly into their home and that's been a delight. And it's been a joy for me to be here and to be part of a congregation that is God focused, Christ honoring and seeking in all that it does to live its life out of the word of God.

And I do trust that the Lord will continue to prosper your life, keep you united in heart, in mind, in soul and spirit and make you beyond all your asking a beacon of hope and light not only in healing but far beyond.

This is one of the most striking of Jesus' parables. He says, The sons of this world or this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

[1 : 35] Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon. It's a remarkable fact and probably I think to most people a surprising fact to notice that Luke devotes so much space in his gospel account of the Lord Jesus Christ to the subject of money and possessions.

You hardly need to read far into the gospel of Luke to find yourself confronted by repeated teaching from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ concerning money and wealth.

It's as if the Lord is saying to those who are beginning to follow him, how you use the resources God has given you in this life is a test run for eternity.

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The Lord Jesus speaks very practically about the nature of the Christian life.

The Christian life, the life that is lived in union with him, the life that is lived out of union with Jesus Christ, is a life, said Jesus, that will use the resources given to it by God wisely and well.

[3 : 08] Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. It's a very striking parable.

The ESV begins there, Jesus said to his disciples there was a rich man who had a manager. And that's a very prosaic translation. Really it's the word steward.

Not someone who simply managed the property of his master, but someone who had oversight over his house. He had tremendous responsibilities.

He was someone who had been entrusted with great responsibilities. And Jesus speaks about this man who is unmasked.

We are not told how he is unmasked, but he was unmasked. And his master said to him, You have been wasting my possessions. And it's interesting that Jesus tells this parable immediately after the parable, the very well-known parable of the prodigal son.

[4 : 21] Or of the prodigal son and the elder brother. If you look down to chapter 15 verse 13, you will see the Lord saying that this younger son had gathered all he had, took it on a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property.

The property given to him by his father. He squandered it, he wasted it. Now the same verb is used. The prodigal son squanders and wastes the resources given to him by his father publicly and flagrantly.

But here is someone else who has squandered, wasted the possessions of his master. But he has not done it publicly, flagrantly.

He's done it quietly, or so he thought. He did it surreptitiously. And I've little doubt that Jesus is expecting, or I should say Luke is expecting us as he juxtaposes these two units of teaching to be confronted by this, that we can be people who squander the privileges given to us by God publicly, openly, flagrantly, or we can be people who squander what God has given to us in a hidden way,

less obvious.

Maybe no one knows that we are misusing, ill-treating, wasting, squandering the good things that God has given to us.

[5 : 57] And Jesus is expecting us, I'm in no doubt, to grasp this, that God sees and God knows.

If we are someone squandering, wasting, abusing the privileges and the resources that he has entrusted to us.

And this man is exposed, and his master says to him, you need to give an account, your time is up. I'm going to dismiss you. And this steward is deeply and profoundly upset.

What shall I do, he says, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I'm not strong enough to dig, I'm ashamed to beg.

What am I going to do? And the Greek text almost has it like a light bulb moment. Ah, ah, I know what I'll do. I've got it, he says, I've got it.

[7 : 03] When I'm removed from my stewardship, so that people will receive me into their houses. Notice that phrase, who will receive me into their houses.

Because later on in verse 9, Jesus will speak about being received into the eternal dwellings. I know what I'll do, so that I won't be a pariah.

I'll be received into their houses. And so he calls his master's debtors. What do you owe my master? Oh, a hundred measures of oil. Quickly, write fifty.

Oh, fine, yes. To someone else, what do you owe? I owe eighteen. Cut it down. Remove it.

Cut it by a quarter. Great. He's continuing to defraud his master. He is a dishonest steward. He is squandering, continuing to squander the resources of his master.

[8 : 03] But what does the master do when he hears about this? Verse 6 The master commended the dishonest steward.

Good for you. Good for you. You think, Lord, are you commending his dishonesty? Don't be stupid. Jesus would have said, commending his dishonesty? I'm the one who is the truth. Well, what are you saying?

The master doesn't commend the man's dishonesty, but he commends him for his shrewdness, his sagacity, his farsightedness.

He's speaking after the manner of men. And here is the point Jesus is making and building up to. For, for, the sons of this age, the unbelievers of this passing world, are more shrewd, more farsighted, more sagacious in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

[9 : 25] He is, in a sense, rebuking his own disciples. He's using this dishonest steward as an illustration, not of the wisdom of dishonesty, but of saying to his disciples, even in his unrighteousness and wickedness, this man looked ahead.

That's the thing. He looked ahead. He made preparations for the future. He was wicked. He was unrighteous.

He was a defrauder. He was a thief. He was a deceiver. But in all of that, there was a shrewdness, an ungodly shrewdness, but a shrewdness. He looked ahead and he prepared for the future.

And so Jesus says to his disciples, I tell you, and that's always a note for us to sit up and take something very significant to heart.

I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth. Now the word wealth, again, mammon is an Aramaic word.

[10 : 44] It's broader than wealth. Your possessions, your resources. Make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous money and resources so that when it fails, when it runs out, they, we'll come to the day in a moment, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

first of all, what does Jesus mean by make friends of unrighteous wealth?

Well, I think the Lord is not saying that possessions in and of themselves are unrighteous. Nowhere in the Bible do you find that. It's not money that is the root of all evil, 1 Timothy 6.

It is the love of money. And Jesus is highlighting, I think, here the propensity of wealth in whatever form we possess it and possessions in whatever form we have them, the propensity for it to be used in an unrighteous way and to come to us from unrighteous sources.

There's nothing untainted in a fallen world. And it's our calling to use the taintedness of a fallen world to the praise and glory of God as God enables us by his grace.

[12 : 27] And so Jesus is saying, make use, make friends, use this unrighteous wealth, possessions, use it wisely and well.

Use it not for your own indulgence, but use it to spread the kingdom of God. And that's why he says, so that when it fails, they, they, may receive you into the eternal dwellings. who are the they? Well, there are some fine commentators who say, well, it's really a circumlocution for God. Those disciples who use it to use the resources that God has given to them wisely and well, not first for their own pleasure and indulgence, not that we are to be monastic in the way we live, God has given us all good things richly to enjoy, but for those who use the resources God has given them wisely and well for the extension of his kingdom, that good use, that wise use of money and resources, will be the means God will use of bringing others into his kingdom, of gathering others out of the dominion of darkness and bringing them into the kingdom of light, unbeknown to you perhaps, as you give your offerings here morning and evening, as you give generously, I would hope, and sacrificially, you just don't know what God might do, you just don't know what God might do, and I've little doubt that it's not so much God as a circumlocution that the Lord is highlighting by the word they, he is saying there will be people in the glory waiting to welcome you, waiting to welcome you, because your self-sacrificial giving of the resources God has entrusted to you as a steward, God used that to bring them into contact with the word of God, with a gospel tract, with a book, with an individual, with someone who was sent partly through your givings to the ends of the earth, to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, or dark as Glasgow, and you will not know until you go to the glory and someone will say, I'm here, brother, sister, because you selflessly denied yourself and shared your resources so generously and God used that in his mercy to bring me to himself.

What a remarkable thing that would be, would it not, if you breathe your last breath in this life and the Lord brings you how it will please him to bring you into his nearer presence and you find there people you've never met before, you've never heard their name, you just have no idea who they are and they're there as it were to welcome you and you say, Lord, who are these people?

[15 : 47] Oh, they are the people that I brought to myself through you. Lord, I didn't know that.

I didn't know that. That doesn't matter. You see, Jesus' parable here is sandwiched between the parable of the prodigal son who squanders his resources flagrantly, publicly, openly. and the chapter concludes with Jesus speaking about the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. And you know the story well.

Lazarus is the poor beggar who sits at the rich man's gate. He's so poor and so benighted that even the dogs lick his sores. And they both die.

Lazarus goes to heaven, goes to Abram's bosom, a picturesque Hebraic way of speaking of the nearer presence of God. And the rich man goes to hell. And a little doubt as you stand far enough back in Luke's gospel, the Lord is saying what an opportunity this rich man had to use his resources to minister to this poor, benighted beggar at his gate.

[17 : 10] It doesn't need to be as dramatic as that. But I think the Lord is saying as we read through the sweep of Luke's gospel and as Luke juxtaposes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit these various encounters.

He was a man who had the opportunity to be welcomed by Lazarus. I've been waiting to welcome you. How kindly you dealt with me. How generously you cared for me.

With what godly concern you lavished upon me. You opened wide not only your arms but your heart to me and god brought me into his kingdom through you and I'm here to welcome you.

But the rich man with all the privileges given to him hoarded them. I've little doubt that the Lord Jesus is highlighting a very significant thing about authentic Christian discipleship.

Authentic Christian discipleship is marked significantly by self-sacrificial giving.

[18 : 25] Think of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich yet for our sakes he became poor so that by his poverty we may become rich. And so the Lord goes on in verses 10 following to say one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much and one who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest in much.

If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, if you have not dealt wisely and well and generously and selflessly with the resources God has given you, who will entrust to you true riches?

Now it's not I think easy precisely to know what our Lord means here but most likely he's saying do you think the true riches of God and of glory will ever be yours if you have not used wisely and well to his glory while in this life the little thing he has given you?

Money and possessions are little things. They are little things. The moment you have them, the moment they began they were subject to the law of entropy, the second law of thermodynamics, they were on the road to destruction.

You can't take anything with you. If you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters.

[19 : 59] Do you see the point Jesus was making? Who is the master of your life? Who do you live to please? Is it yourself? Or is it the God who has redeemed you and made you his own?

You cannot serve two masters. You will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

do you love the other things? What does all that mean for us? That's brief exposition. What does that mean for us? Three things I want to say this evening.

Number one, very obviously, Jesus is counselling, encouraging and pressing on his disciples to live their lives in the light of eternity. You see, this unrighteous steward had the news, the foresight to look ahead, to prepare for what was coming.

And Jesus said, you know, the sons of this age are wise or more shrewd than the sons of life. And I find that a huge challenge. How honestly, how realistically do I live my life in the light of eternity?

[21 : 20] It's so easy to live as if this life would simply go on and on and on. Yesterday, yesterday, it seems to me, yesterday I was 37.

I know I was 67. I look in the mirror and I think, who are you? Do I know you? Are you my dad? What's happened to you? Why do you look like that? I don't feel as though I should look like that.

But I do. Life is swifter than a weaver's shuttle. And soon and very soon, we will meet the Lord.

About 30 years ago, in New Mills, I was a parish minister in Ayrshire for 20 years. The lovely couple we supported and still support in different ways, church planting in France.

They've been church planting for over 50 years with WEC. and they have no great education.

They're two of the godliest people I've ever met. And they came and spoke at our prayer meeting.

[22 : 18] And I'll never forget something he said. He quoted two lines of a little poem. It's almost doggerel. The poetry's not very good, but the theology's wonderful.

Only one life, soon it must pass. last. I've never forgotten that.

It pricks my conscience then. It pricks my conscience tonight. Only one life, soon it must last. Only what's done for Jesus will last.

Now, Jesus isn't encouraging us to opt out of life. Far from it. We have to live in the midst of this world, the salt and light.

But at the same time, we have to live pilgrim lives. This world is not our home. And one day we shall stand before the Lord and give an account of our lives.

[23 : 18] We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5.10, and give an account of the deeds done in the body. And Jesus is saying, look ahead.

Look ahead. who's well done are you aiming for in life? Are you living in the light of eternity?

Because life is very swift. You're in the fullness of it, and before you know it, in the blink of an eye, it's just disappearing through your fingers.

Live in the light of eternity, Jesus is saying, be shrewd like this dishonest steward. Have foresight.

But then secondly, remember that we are all stewards of everything we possess.

You do not possess one iota. Hands up if you own a house. I do. Hands up. No, you don't. It's God's.

[24 : 28] You say, well, I pay the mortgage. You may pay the mortgage. Every penny you pay is given to you by the sovereign Lord in his good pleasure and kindness. You say, I've got no mortgage.

That's because of the good pleasure of God. The clothes you wear, the food you eat, the children you have, they are all the Lord's.

But you have them as stewards. He has given them to you as a trust. They are entrusted to you.

And one day the Lord is going to say, what did you do with those precious little things that I gave to you?

What did you do with that home that I entrusted to you in my bounty? What did you do with this, that or the other? Whether we have little or much is of little consequence, but what did you do?

Because nothing we have is our own. What do we have that we did not first receive? we would be penniless beggars with nothing, not an iota, not an iota of clothing, if it were not for the good

pleasure, kindness and goodness of God.

[25 : 43] We are stewards and we have an account to give. I don't think that means that we are to say, oh well, I shouldn't go holidays, I shouldn't do this, I shouldn't do that.

We each live before God, we are to live before the face of God. We are not to judge other people, not to stand in judgment saying, ah, you are not using the resources God has given you.

It's enough for us to be asking ourselves every day, am I using the resources well and wisely that God has given to me? I'm a steward. Are you being a wise, godly steward?

And then thirdly, I think we need to understand that Christian giving and Christian serving in the new covenant is sacrificial and not proportional.

You may not agree with me, and that's fine, I don't get everything right. I think we can take comfort in saying, well I tithe. But if the Lord Jesus Christ is our exemplar in everything, he gave everything for us.

[26 : 56] He didn't tithe himself, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this theology comes in the midst of this lengthy exposition on Christian giving in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. Christian giving and Christian serving is not proportional, it's sacrificial.

It should cost us not not but that can be taken wrongly, I know, but I don't want to qualify, I could qualify it, hopefully helpfully, but I'm not going to.

Christian giving and Christian serving should cost us, not 9 to 5, not saying, given my tithe, maybe 1% is sacrificial for some people, I absolutely mean that, I believe that, maybe 99% for other people who live before God, that's why read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Christian giving and Christian serving is to be sacrificial, the church of Jesus Christ is worthy of our highest and our best, to use the well worn old phrase, we're to lay all on the altar for the Saviour, we're to be living sacrifices, we're to be daily oblations, giving all that we are to him who gave everything and beyond for us.

I remember some years ago reading the biography of William Borden, it's called William Borden of Yale, he was a young man, a very wealthy young man who was at the University of Yale, the third best university in the world, two ahead of Oxford and two behind Cambridge, you can work that out, and he was converted, he came to faith in Jesus Christ and for some reason he set his heart on going to the land of Burma, Myanmar, and he prepared to go to Burma, he graduated but he was persuaded to spend some time travelling throughout America encouraging young men in particular to give up their small ambitions and to go out east and preach the gospel and he did that for some two years or three years, I can't remember and then the day came when William Borden set sail from New York heading for the land of Burma and in those days the first great port of call was

[30 : 00] Alexandria in Egypt and when he got to Alexandria William Borden was struck down with cerebral encephalitis he was going to die in Alexandria he would never see Burma he had lived to go to Burma since he was converted but he would never see Burma he would die and be buried in Alexandria as he lay dying three medical men gathered round the bottom of his bed and one of them said what a waste they knew about his life and his promise wealthy young man what a waste and you understand that humanly speaking what a waste and with the little strength he had left William Borden raised himself and simply said no retreat no reserve no regrets no retreat no reserve no regrets that's a life that understood that he had to give everything and even though the

Lord would take him to glory before he ever saw Burma that was for the Lord that's what Jesus I think is teaching his disciples be sons of light who live in the light of eternity recognize you are stewards with an account one day to give and understand that belonging to me is not proportional but sacrificial you see in the light of the Lord's giving of himself for us how can we dare not give everything we are to him I did this for you and eternity will be an exploration of what that meant in 10,000 times 10,000 years we will be no nearer plumbing the immensities and the infinities of what it meant for the Son of God to become flesh and become a curse on Calvary's cross

I did all that for you what did you do for me wouldn't you want to be able to say Lord I didn't do much but by your grace and by the enabling of your spirit I sought to give my own tis the least I could do as we come to the Lord's table we're going to sing!