

Luke 16:1-15, 23-26

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[0 : 00] So Luke 16, I don't know if you've heard the human brain, you've probably heard the human brain is more like a picture gallery than a debating hall.! And the Lord Jesus Christ, he is a master preacher, he is the greatest preacher who has ever preached, and he preaches in pictures. He preaches in pictures, so he describes himself as the good shepherds, as the bread of life, as the light of the world, as the door. And as he speaks those things, you're meant to picture them. And the church is described as a body, and as a bride, and as a branch of Christ. They're all pictures, aren't they? The Bible is a picture book. Pictures fill the Bible with God's revelation to us. And here, every parable of Jesus is a picture. And no doubt, as Judy read this passage to you, you have a picture in your mind's eye.

You've got a picture of what this shrewd, dishonest manager looks like. And Jesus wants you to have that picture, he wants you to work that out. He wants you this morning to use your imagination. So that you can see in your mind's eye what kind of person this was. And it's amazing, isn't it? I grew up with a hymn book, and long, boring sermons, so lots of sermons would be spent thumbing through the hymn book. And it's amazing, isn't it? You change one word of a hymn, and it completely changes the meaning.

[1 : 25] So, take my life and let it be, which we'll sing later. Take my wife and let me be. One word, isn't it? It changes everything. Think of, guide me, O thou great Jehovah, when I tread the verge of Jordan.

You know, it's speaking about, when I get to heaven, isn't it? Bid my anxious fears subside, death of death and hell's destruction, land my safe on Canaan's side. Now, it's not actually land my safe, is it? It's land me safe.

But how many people would love to land their safe, all they have on Canaan's side? In other words, I want to take it with me. And you cannot take it with me.

There's a verse in the Bible that everyone believes. Even my most ardent atheist neighbour believes it. It's the verse of 1 Timothy, which says, we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of the world.

That is reality, isn't it? You didn't come in with anything, you will not go out with anything. And Jesus is giving us very practical teaching. Now, notice the context. Look at verse 1.

[2 : 32] The disciples, he also says to the disciples. The disciples are listening to him. But as always in Luke's Gospel, there is a double audience. Can you notice in verse 14, the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were also listening.

They heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. So there's a double audience. Verse 1 tells us that there is an accusation against the manager for wasting his master's resources.

And verse 3 tells us the manager is about to be sacked. And what does he do in response to him being sacked? Well, notice first of all, he gives a realistic assessment of himself.

He looks at his body, and he says, listen to verse 3, I'm not strong enough to dig. I'm not strong enough to be a labourer.

I'm too proud to beg, and I'm too dumb to steal. I've been a manager a long time. I'm a weak person now. And so he devises a strategy, a plan, based on this realistic assessment of himself, in the light of his certain future.

[3 : 42] He says, I know what I will do. I will act favourably towards my master's debtors, so that when I lose my job, they will owe me a favour. When I'm out of work, they will need to repay the favour.

When I've lost my job, they will see me right. So verse 5, he goes in and he calls the master's debtors. And the first man, he says, how much do you owe? He says, I owe 500, 800 gallons of

olive oil.

He says, write it down, I'll take 400. Verse 7. The next man says, how much do you owe? Well, I owe 1,000 bushels of wheat. Write it down. I'll take 800 bushels of wheat.

And that is what makes, doesn't it, the response in verse 8, so remarkable. Just look at it. This is the man who's been ripped off. He's been ripped off by 400 gallons of oil.

He's been ripped off by 200 bushels of wheat. He's been ripped off. But verse 8 tells us, the owner commends the dishonest man. Now that is where our difficulty lies, isn't it?

[4 : 46] As you read this passage, you think, what is this doing in the Bible? In understanding this parable, look at verse 8. The master commended the dishonest manager because he'd acted dishonestly.

Well, that is how we often read it. But it's not how it is, is it? What is being commanded there in verse 8 is not dishonestly, but shrewdness. The master commended the dishonest manner because he'd acted shrewdly.

Here is a dishonest man's good example. He is an example of shrewdness. And notice what the Lord Jesus goes on to say. He says, choose well the models that you follow.

For the sons of the world, that's the second part of verse 8. The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. Isn't that true?

Bill Gates, Rupert Murdoch, the celebrities, the Alan Shivers of this world, the people like that.

Verse 8. Well, the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

[5 : 48] That is right, isn't it? We seem so stumbly, aren't we? And so lazy. And yet those people, they're always doing deals. They're always shrewd in their management of wealth.

And so the Lord Jesus says, learn from them. Learn from them. Take a realistic assessment of yourself and your situation. And now act in the light of eternity.

To ensure that you get a warm welcome into eternity. So you think of Rupert Murdoch. You think of the wealthy men of this country. And they are working, aren't they? The businessmen, towards the end of the financial year.

All their eyes are on the 30th of March. What is their position going to be on that day? And so Jesus is saying, you have all your eyes, not on the 30th of March, but on eternity.

When you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. And enter into them. Assess yourself now. Live now. Wisely in the light of the certain future.

[6 : 50] Look at verse 9. Jesus says, and I tell you, make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous wealth. Use worldly wealth. And use it to gain friends for yourself.

So that when it's gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Act shrewdly with a view to that certain day. When you will stand before God and enter into glory.

Use them now. But live in the light of the future. Not on the 30th of March. Live in the light of your entrance of eternity. Now I think we don't often hear reminders of this.

That wealth. Money. Is a dreadful master. Don't let it master you. You master your wallet.

In the name of Jesus. As a servant. Wealth is very very useful. It's a useful servant. And I think we need those reminders. I remember being at a ministers conference.

[7 : 55] Quite a number of the men I know. Tragically. Have left their wives. Who are ministers. They've ended up going off with other women. And they've shipwrecked their ministry.

And a very senior minister came along. And to speak to us. On walking in sexual purity. And in sexual integrity. And this man said. Let me tell you my habit.

My habit is to keep reminding my body. That Jesus is in control. And my body is not in control of me. And so often. Very often. In the middle of winter. I go to the bathroom.

And on a Wednesday morning. I turn on the cold tap in the shower. And my body recoils. And says. I'm not going in there. And I say. Body. In there. In the name of Jesus. Because you're not in control.

And I'll be running around the streets. He says. And I'm absolutely exhausted. And my body says. I can't go on. I can't go on. And I say. Body. In the name of Jesus.

[8 : 51] Go on. Now this man is an English public school boy. That might explain it. But I want to say to you. It is exactly the same as your wealth. That you need to give your wealth.

A good lesson this morning. That make sure. That it is not your wallet. That is dictating to you. Make sure that your wallet understands.

That Jesus is Lord. Now this is a surprising punchline. Isn't it? Verse 9. Isn't it surprising? Jesus is a better theologian than you are. And Jesus knows all about justification by faith alone.

But surely. But he is saying isn't he. Use wealth now. Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth. So that you can determine. That you will receive a particularly warm welcome on that day.

And then he goes on in verse 10. To say. It says. Use your wealth now. It is actually indicative. Of your spiritual fitness. How you use your wealth.

[9 : 52] In verses 10 to 12. Is indicative. Shows you. How you are able to handle the gospel truth. How you are able to be a steward. A messenger of the gospel.

Now we have seen that before. Isn't it? Where your heart is. There your treasure will be also. No. That is not what Jesus says. Where your treasure is. There your heart will be also. What you do with your money. Shows what your Christian life is like.

One level of faithfulness. Will indicate another level of faithfulness. And then Jesus goes on in verse 13. Doesn't he. To say. You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God. At the end of verse 13.

And you cannot serve God. And the great God substitute. Money. It's all very well isn't it. For us. As long as wealth. And God.

Are going in the same direction. I can follow them. But at some point. There's a fork in the road. And God says. Come this way. And wealth says.

[10 : 48] No. Come this way. Be secure. Make the wise investment decision. Go this way. And it's a compromised decision. And Jesus is right.

You cannot go both ways. You cannot go both ways. Use wealth. To serve God. Do not serve God. Do not use God.

To serve wealth. Use wealth. To serve God. Do not use God. To serve wealth. Make sure. That you bring your wealth. Today.

Under the control of Jesus. And I don't know. I don't know. How better. To remind your wallet. And give your money. A lesson. Who is in control.

Than by giving it away. If you can think of a better lesson. Tell me. And I think it's a great lesson. That you and I need to teach our wallet. Very often. So you remember.

[11 : 42] Don't you. In Luke chapter 1. Luke is writing to Theophilus. He's writing to Theophilus. That he might have certainty. And one of the things. That he tells Theophilus. Is that not only did he do research well.

But he also tells Theophilus. That he's providing an ordered account. So you would expect. Therefore. In the context of this parable. It will tell us something. About the parable itself.

And sure enough. If you look at the next parable. Look at the next parable. It starts in verse 19. And you will see. That it's a parable. That has to do with wealth. Now notice verse 19.

There is a man here. Described. There was a rich man. Clothed in purple. And fine linen. And who feasted sumptuously. Every day.

Here is a man. Described as somebody. Who has everything. But he has no name. Did you notice that? Notice his identity.

[12 : 40] It is determined by his riches. Verse 19. There was a rich man. That is all he is known as. You know him. But you don't know his name. You don't know his name was John.

Or Abraham. Or Joshua. Or whatever his name was. But he was a rich man. He was defined by his portfolio. His wealth. But there was also a poor man. And a poor man who has nothing.

He has nothing. But he has a name. He is called Lazarus. Lazarus means. He whom God helps. What made the rich man rich?

Was it cloth? Was it grain? Was it land? Was it minerals? We don't know. We don't know how this man got his wealth. And we don't know how he was doing that year.

Particularly in his wealth accumulation. And his growth. But we do know that every day he would pass by Lazarus. Sitting at his gate. In desperate poverty. And he made no investment in Lazarus.

[13 : 38] He made no investment in Lazarus. Because what dividend? What payback could Lazarus give? How could Lazarus help him? And then the story goes on. And we call death.

Don't we? People say. That death is the great leveler. Have you heard that? It's nothing of a thought. Look at verse 22. It's a great reversal. Lazarus dies.

And goes to Abraham's side. In fellowship with God. The rich man dies. And simply goes off into Hades or hell. He is cut off from God's blessing. Because you cannot take anything with you. Except you can take one thing with you. Can't you? You technically can't take a thing at all. But you can take a person. People are eternal.

People will go on into eternity. Flat screen TVs will not go into eternity. iPads will not go into eternity. Second homes.

[14 : 43] Investments won't go into eternity. People will go into eternity. And that is why William and Catherine Booth took as their own personal motto.

They were the founders of the Salvation Army. The motto of the Salvation Army is blood and fire. But the Booths took as their personal motto one word. Others. Others.

Others. This is the reality. We exist for others. Because we know. People are eternal. And their eternal health is important. That they have a soul.

And an inner being. That is well and healthy. There is a story of a man. Who bought two sets of stickers. Red stickers. Stickers. And green stickers. And he went around his house.

And he put a red sticker. On every consumable in the home. And then he put a green sticker. On everything that would last. Into eternity. Then he sat back on the seat. And he looked at what was surrounding him.

[15 : 42] And he was surrounded by red stickers. The only green stickers. Were on his wife and children. I can't imagine how they felt about that. But they were the only ones. Who would last into eternity.

And what that man realised. Is he realised. I'm spending all my time on consumables. Consumables which I can't take with me. But it is people.

That you can take. So Jesus is saying here in verse 9. Use your money well. To invest shrewdly in the eternal health of people. Use your money well. To invest shrewdly in the eternal health of people.

I was brought up in a Christian home. In a great home. In a home that tithed. I was brought up to tithe. The pocket money I get. One in ten goes to the Lord. Now I could go to my dad.

And I could say. Listen dad. I'm not so sure that the New Testament is so explicit about tithing.

There's a distinction. In some ways between law and grace. My father would have exactly the right answer for me.

[16 : 45] As I feel him give many times. He would say. When you give more under grace. Than I give under law. Then you can come and tell me. That is right. Do you think you're required to give less under grace.

Than you are under law. We are dealing aren't we. With a generation. That is passing away as tithers. And so many New Christians. They don't tithe anymore. We're not under the law to tithe. But one in ten. Is a very very good biblical principle. Just as one in seven for us. Is a good principle. Money is made around. To go around. My father.

The moment he was converted. His wallet was converted. He was converted in his twenties. And he was a generous giver. My brother was on a train two years ago. Going to Swindon. And a man came up to him.

And said. Are you Alan Levy's boy? We all look alike. And he said yes. He said. Your dad. Forty years ago. Paid for me to go to Bible college. I told him I couldn't go.

[17 : 45] And your dad said. I'll give you this much each month. The man was David Brown. He used to come home from furlough. And break all our toys. But that's another story. At my parents.

50th wedding anniversary. In December. My brother made a speech. Saying that dad had taught us. To be generous. And he told the story. The best thing about it. Was my mother didn't know. That my father had done it. Are you teaching your wealth a lesson? But you say. I'm a child. The application is still the same.

I'm a little boy or girl. I don't have much money. Teach your wealth a lesson. I'm a student. As if you're on another level of being. Teach your wealth a lesson.

I'm paying rent through the nose. Teach your wealth a lesson. I've got student loans. Teach your wealth a lesson. I've got a mortgage. I've got a mortgage. And children. I'm retired.

[18 : 43] Teach your wealth a lesson. Jesus goes on. Does the end verses 14 and 15. Luke adds. The Pharisees were there. They loved money.

They sneered at God. Isn't that very interesting? The two things there. They loved money. They sneered at God. And Jesus says. What is highly valued amongst Men.

Outward security. And esteem. It is nothing. In the eyes of God. What counts with God. Well what do we know? We know that what counts with God. Is godliness. And contentment.

And that is great gain. Money's. Mastery. Is monstrous. Money's mastery. Is monstrous. Let us determine.

To be shrewd. And to put to work. The worldly wealth. We have. With eternity in mind. I often wonder. If I was a Christian.

[19 : 36] In Nazi Germany. In the 1930s. Would I have stood with. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Or would I have stood with Hitler? The majority of Christians. Stood with Adolf Hitler. If I was a Christian.

In apartheid South Africa. In the 1960s. Would I have stood with Mandela? Or would I have stood. With the apartheid government? The majority of Christians. Stood with the apartheid government. Today. Are we being compromised?

A hundred years from now. Will Christians. Read about our generation. And look at us. And say. How could they have been. So blind? Listen to this.

Missionary prayer letter. From a couple working in Nigeria. They say. There are some good things. Happening in our church. Our church in Nigeria. Is being pastored. By a Nigerian man. And we are very happy. With this solid.

Biblical sermons. Though we can't get used. To the volume. Of everyone praying out aloud together. That is hard to take. But at least. It hides our bad language skills. Talking about their pastor.

[20 : 35] His teaching and his experience. Have given him a good grasp. Of the things that are holding back. The church in Nigeria. One being. The continued grip. That animism. And the occult has. Because it impacts.

The everyday lives of people. It is so ingrained. In their lives. That it is accepted here. As normal. Now when I read that. I must say. I thought that. I thought that is the church in Africa.

Isn't it? It's under oppression. From the occult. Fearing the spirits. I thought of myself. Typical of the church in Africa. In my white superior sort of way. But it didn't stop there.

Let me read you the full sentence. The continued grip. That animism. And occultism. Has impacting. The day to day lives of people. It is so ingrained. In their lives. That it is accepted here.

As normal. In the same way. That our chasing after wealth. Is accepted as normal. In the west. You see brothers and sisters. Here is our blind spot. Right here.

[21 : 31] It is right here. In your working account. And mine. And it may well be a blind spot. Let me speak to the elders.

And deacons of this church. Let us never. Never. Never be embarrassed. When we want to build. The ministry team of the church. Or we need to come to the church.

And say actually. We need to give to a building. Because we want the work of the gospel. To go forward. For generations to come. We must never be embarrassed. About bringing that need to the church. Because when we do that.

As elders and deacons. We are saying to you. We are giving you an opportunity. To make an eternal investment. Support us. And you are going to support.

And move for the eternal health. And the salvation of people. And there will be a warm welcome. Awaiting for you in heaven. When we are given the opportunity.

[22 : 29] To give. To build the church. To give. So that the gospel. Will go out to all the nations. Of the earth. We are giving ourselves. An opportunity. To make an eternal investment. For the health and salvation of people.

And that is why. We must not be embarrassed. About saying actually. There is a need for giving. There is a massive need for giving. In the church. There is a massive need for giving. In the church now.

And there will be. Over the next number of years. I read something on economics. I know nothing about economics. But this made sense. All money has an economic cost.

That is. You cannot spend money on a cake. And on an ice cream as well. If you spend. On a cake. The economic cost. Of spending the money on the cake. Means that you can't have an ice cream.

So children. You buy Lego. With your. Pocket money. It takes all your money. To buy the Lego. Well you cannot buy yourself sweets. Can you? You can't do that. It's only one or the other. You

cannot do two things.

[23 : 24] With the same pound. And that is a great reminder. To you and I. Is that. Every time I say no. To a consumable. Every time I say no. To Lego. Or I say no. To sweets.

Or I say no. To comics. I'm freeing myself. To say yes. To the spiritual welfare. Of others. Every time I say no.

To that flat screen TV. Or no. To that new car. Or no. To that new sofa. Or no. To that extension. Or no. To that new house. And none of those things. Are bad things. Let me say that. But when we say no.

To them. We are freeing ourselves. To say yes. To others. To the eternal health. Of others. There's an older ministry. In London. Who in his retirement.

A number of years ago. Visited lots and lots. Of gospel preaching churches. In our city. He listened to lots of recordings. Of people preaching in London. This is one of mine. And he said. Every sermon.

[24 : 21] Had one defect. I did not hear. One word of warning. And I need to be warned. Wealth.

Can find a place. In your heart. And mine. And we need to root it out. And we need to teach our wealth. A lesson. That Jesus is Lord. I go to Hamel Cafe.

Because I. That seems to come up. Quite a lot of my sermons. I have a bacon egg roll. And a can of coke. For bread. It's the breakfast of champions. But if I go there tomorrow. As I probably will. And I take the American dollars. That I have with me. And I say to the Turkish owner. That. I say take it. Take it. He would say. That is not British sterling money.

And I would say. No. It's American dollars. And it's worth even more. Than what your bacon and egg is. Take it. Go on. Take it. He would say. No. I don't have to go on my slate.

[25 : 24] And I will be in his debt. The Turkish man would say to me. He would say. Your dollars mean nothing here. They are not legal tender. I trust that you will get to heaven.

I trust that you will stand at the gates of heaven. And let's say you empty out your pockets. What have you got? A house. A flat.

A portfolio. A portfolio. A car. A flat screen TV. An iPhone.

Look. I've got it all. You will hear the words. It means nothing here. It means nothing here. It is not legal tender here. It is not legal tender.

I got to the US. I arrived in Houston airport. I've been on a nine hour flight. You arrive in America. And you queue for passport control. And the terrifying.

[26 : 29] Large people with guns. And dogs. And I stood in a queue. For 25 minutes. To get passport control. There was a very very large black woman. In an ill fitting uniform.

Which looked like it was about to burst. And I came to the front of the queue. And I came to the desk. I was fed up. And I was tired. I handed her my passport. She looked at me. And said. Long flight. I smiled. She said. Put your right hand on the machine. Put your fingerprints in. Put your left hand. Do your thumb. Look into the camera.

And they always ask you. What are you here for? And I said. I'm a Presbyterian minister. Visiting churches to preach. She said. Preaching what? I said.

Preaching the gospel. She stamped the passport. Closed it. With a broad smile. She said. You are most welcome brother.

[27 : 26] I walked on through. You're at the gates of heaven. And you empty your pockets. And somebody shouts.

I remember you. Didn't you come to my village. To translate the scriptures. I remember you. Didn't you give money.

So that that lady. Could go to Morocco. And reach. Men and women. With the gospel there. I remember you. Didn't you come. To share the gospel.

In that summer camp. I remember you. You gave money. So that. That my daughter. Could go to that summer camp. And she was converted there. I remember you. You gave money.

To help build that village. In ridiculously expensive London. Which served the gospel. For generations to come. I remember you. Didn't you support. Those missionaries.

[28 : 20] That trained up. A generation of workers. I remember you. And then there is a voice. That is heard. Over all of them. And it says this. As much as you have done. Unto the least of these.

You've done it unto me. I tell you. Very. Very. Very. Very. Very. Very. Be warned. Be warned.

Use worldly wealth. To gain friends. To gain friends. For yourselves. So that when it is gone. You will be welcomed. Into eternal dwellings. The master commended.
The dishonest manager. Because he acted shrewdly. A shrewd. And generous. Use of wealth. May that characterize IPC.
Let us pray. Amen.