

Uniquely Jesus: God and Money | Pentecost 15 | Luke 16:1-15
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Jesus calls his disciples, those who have been found by the Good Shepherd, to live a life of trustworthiness and generosity.

There's really no way to begin here this morning other than to tell you straight out that I have no idea what's going on in Luke 16:1-15. But in my defense, neither does anyone else. There are as many readings and interpretations of this parable and the material that follows as there are theologians and authors. However as I've studied this text this week, spending time reading and re-reading it, and reading what others have said about it, I believe it's an important text for us today, one that will continue to challenge us as we continue on in this series Uniquely Jesus.

Again, Jesus wants to draw a distinction between His followers from the rest of the world. Jesus is comparing and contrasting two groups of people: Children of this Age and the Children of the Light. And in doing so, Jesus is calling us to live a life not as the dishonest manager does or even the property owner does, but as ones who have been called out from this world and called to be a follower of Jesus. And all of this centers on how we deal with and handle money.

Pastors and churches shy away from talking about money and, frankly, I don't like it either. But Jesus talks so much about money in the Gospels because money isn't just a money issue. It's not a neutral thing in our lives. Money, in Jesus' eyes, is a very spiritual thing and it has spiritual ramifications so Jesus is quite concerned with how his followers utilize this tool they have been given.

So this is the vantage point from which we're going to proceed this morning. We're going to go through this parable and uncover how Jesus is calling us to live and act as his disciples with regard to worldly wealth because again this has spiritual ramifications.

Luke 16:1a

"Jesus told his disciples..."

Jesus, as the text begins, is talking with his disciples. Over the last few weeks Jesus has been directing his words to different groups of people...those who follow after him to hear him teach, Pharisees and Tax collectors who don't always like what he's teaching and who he's teaching it to. And now Jesus turns to his disciples. He turns to those 12 who are in his inner circle and he tells them the most confusing parable ever.

He directs his words at them, though, we will see that there are others who overhear his teaching and openly scoff and disagree. But we want to notice first that this is primarily a teaching for his disciples and, therefore, a teaching for us to. Who are we supposed to be as Jesus' disciples? What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to live?

These are the questions that we ask *after* having been brought into Jesus' flock. The shepherd/sheep metaphor was one that we worked with last week as Jesus demonstrated that he

is our shepherd who pursues us **relentlessly**, who tends to our wounds **carefully**, and celebrates our return **joyfully**.

So these aren't questions about how we score points with God. These aren't questions about how we please God. These aren't questions about what we can do to enter into eternal life. These are the 'now what?' questions of followers of Jesus. Does that make sense?

Let's keep going and as we go, we're going to make some observations and pull some things out of it in order to see what Jesus is teaching us this morning.

Luke 16:1b-2

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

The first thing we notice and, this is how the parable gets its popular name, the Parable of the Unfaithful Manager/Steward, the manager was a terrible steward of the rich man's possessions. Whether it was through dishonesty, negligence, or incompetence, the manager is wasting the possessions of his master. As we hear more from Jesus we're going to find out that Jesus is teaching on faithfulness and trustworthiness with possessions and money. The manager here shows that he is, of course, untrustworthy, therefore he is not to be emulated under any circumstances.

Luke 16:3-4

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

The manager is in a hopeless situation. There are no other vocational alternatives that he would be happy with. Digging is not a possible alternative, and neither is begging. So through this internal dialogue which Jesus narrates for us, the manager devises a plan that will act as a kind of social safety net after his paychecks stop coming in.

Luke 16:5-7

"So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'" "Nine hundred gallons of olive oil," he replied. "The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.'" "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'" "A thousand bushels of wheat," he replied. "He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'"

So this manager, when he's confronted with his ineptitude, he proceeded to shrewdly use the debts of his master in order to gain favor with others in order that he would be taken care of (in this temporal life) after he lost his job. Some argue here that the manager was actually sacrificing his own cut of the debts in order to garner favor. They say that it was common and accepted practice for a steward to charge a commission on a loan therefore he is not actually defrauding his boss, he's simply eliminating his cut. His boss gets paid back and the debtors are now in debt

to the former manager. And I suppose this could be the case but frankly, I'm not sure that it matters all that much for we read on...

Luke 16:8

*“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly (prudently).”
[the parable ends here and Jesus continues] For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light”*

The master was impressed by the shrewdness of his former manager. At this point we're really confused because we're used to reading parables where the master or the rich man or the father or the master is a stand-in for God, right? I don't think we should do that here. The context and content of the parable make it impossible to read it in this way. Rather, we understand the master as one who commended such shrewdness because he is as much a son of this age as the manager is. One shrewd man is impressed by the shrewdness of another shrewd man. [Tell MPC Xbox Story] This is just how the sons and daughters of this age live and move and have their being. Again, Jesus is calling on his disciples to *not* be like them. Why? Well Jesus goes on...

Luke 16:9

“I tell you [that is, his disciples, the People of the Light], use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings”

Verses 8 & 9 are clearly the ones that cause us (me?) much angst. Why is the manager commended for acting the way he does? Why does Jesus instruct his disciples to use worldly wealth, literally in greek “mammon of unrighteousness” in order to gain friends for ourselves. These are perplexing statements to say the least. We've already talked about verse 8 and we shouldn't take this as normative for the Christian. But there are two things I want us to notice in verse 9.

- 1) It seems to me that this is where Jesus is really drawing his contrast between the Children of this Age and the Children of the Light. Here's what I see:
 - a) The master commends one behavior of his former manager but Jesus, makes an emphatic statement that leads me to believe he's contrasting what he's going to say with what the master said. Jesus says, and this is a very wooden, word for word translation of Luke's Greek: “I to you I say...”
 - i) Jesus emphatically adds the 1st person pronoun where it's not necessary and then emphatically states his indirect object. The master said this but I to you (that is, I to you my disciples, say...”
 - ii) This is the important contrast. Sons and daughters of the light are not to treat one another shrewdly or dishonestly. They are not to be unfaithful in the use of the gifts that God has given to them. They are to be generous and honest. This is what Jesus is calling his people to for how we handle something like money is indicative of how we handle the Gospel.
- 2) We need to let Jesus' other teachings on money and wealth be our guide for what Jesus is teaching here in this less than clear parable. Jesus never teaches his disciples to use

wealth unrighteously and that's not what he's teaching here. Don't use wealth unrighteously, but use the wealth of this world in accord with how I, Jesus, have taught you. That is, generously. That is, with humility, That is, in order to love and serve the poor.

Because the manager used worldly wealth in order to take care of himself in this life. What does Jesus say? You can use wealth to serve others in this life because you know that God has made an eternal dwelling for you. The manager is worried about this temporal world. But you don't have to because of the promise of the eternal world.

It's in the next verses where I think the payoff is and where everything is tied together...

Luke 16:10-12

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?”

Here is where we finally come to the point of this whole thing. Faithfulness in a little leads to faithfulness in much. You know this from work or from school or from your interactions with your parents. If you're trustworthy with the little things, if you come through with the little things, you will be trusted more with the big things. For Jesus it's simply this: If you can't be trusted with something as stupid and worthless as money, how can we be expected to handle something like true riches. How can we be expected to handle the Gospel? If we're unfaithful with something as unimportant as money, how can we faithfully handle the Words of Life that come from our savior?

Jesus, then is calling his disciples to be faithful managers. Not just so that we can use the gifts of God prudently. But so that we can practice for when we're given what is truly important. How we handle money, then, will be indicative of how we handle the boundless riches of the Gospel.

And ultimately, Jesus sums it up like this:

Luke 16:13

“No one can serve two masters.”

If money is your master, you are not being faithful with what God has given you. God has given you money in order to love and serve your neighbor. But if money takes the place of a god, if we place all our faith and trust in the bottom line, then we've missed the point entirely. You can't serve God and money. The Pharisees are, themselves, case in point. They scoffed at Jesus because they thought they could serve God while at the same time loving money. But because Jesus is Jesus he sees right through them. All their outward religiosity was just that. Outward. Their hearts had not been transformed. Their trust was not in God. They served only the mammon of unrighteousness.

Conclusion and Take-Aways

We'll wrap this up this morning with some quick take-aways. We've gone through the text, perhaps I've made my case for one particular reading of this very difficult parable, maybe I haven't. I'll let you be the judge of that. But if Jesus is making a contrast between the Children of this Age and the Children of the Light, what are those contrasts?

Children of this Age → Untrustworthy and Shrewd

Children of the Light → Trustworthy and Generous

Children of this Age → Focus on Temporal Comfort

Children of the Light → Focus on Eternity

Children of the Age → Serving One's Self

Children of the Light → Serving God, Serving Others

Money, and ultimately the Gospel, are about serving others not ourselves. If our money is self-serving, we'll see the Gospel as self-serving. If our money is directed inward, so too will our proclamation of the Gospel be directed inward.

Money is a spiritual issue. It has the power to pull us in one direction or the other. God has given it to us for our benefit and for the benefit of the world around us. Therefore, as his disciples, he wasn't to make sure we use it correctly.

Ultimately, God says this to us: Let me be your God. I have your good in mind. Let me be your God and Let me take care of you. For I am generous in my love. I have your eternity in mind. For I send my one and only Son to serve you through his life, death, and resurrection. So trust in me.