

You cannot serve God and money

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] Let's pray. Lord help us great God. Wonderful God. To hear your voice to us this evening. As we are gathered in the name of Jesus.

! He deserves.

For Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. Please turn to Luke chapter 16. And we're going to look at. One of the tough things that Jesus said.

Where he said you cannot serve God and money. It's Luke 16 verse 13. So I think this is a difficult thing that Jesus said.

We. We live in an affluent society. A society where people have money. We may not think so.

[1 : 18] But if you've ever been to the developing world. Where people have one shirt. That's it. Where people don't. Where the chaps don't have. A decent pair of trousers.

I don't have shoes. The idea of having. A car. Or. A house with more than one room. Would be absolute luxury.

I mean we. In that sense we. We're like. Kings and princes. Mind you. There's. Extremes in our society.

So if any of you is a professional footballer. You probably. Earn loads and loads of money. Or if you were a banker. Or you work in the city. Probably got more money than.

One might like to shake a stick at. But. Whatever situation we are in. In life. Or however we feel ourselves to be financially. Jesus said.

[2 : 18] You cannot. Serve. Both. God. And money. And I think that's a tough saying. And when I was thinking about what to speak on.

I thought. I don't really want to speak on this. But. I thought. Well that's probably a good reason for. For speaking on it actually. So I'm. Let me do justice.

I'm. Taking my thoughts. From. A book. Which I've got out. And put down somewhere. Where is it? That's underneath there. Thank you. Okay. I recommend this book to you.

I wish Jesus hadn't said that. But I'm really glad he did. By Steve Timmis. It takes a number of difficult things. That Jesus says. And works them through. And.

So I. Recommend that to you. IVP. I was sent it as a review copy. So I don't know how much it cost.

[3 : 16] Thank you. In the original. And you may remember this from the authorised version.

It uses the word mammon. You cannot serve both God and mammon. Don't use the word mammon very often. In the Bible. It's used about half a dozen times. And it's Jesus each time who says it.

It comes from. An Aramaic. Word. So Aramaic would have been the language. Most probably that Jesus spoke. And it's a.

Comma. M. N. I've no idea how to pronounce that. But it looks a little bit like. Amen. Now whether this is. Just me making it up.

I don't know. But the front bit is usually an. Ah. Is it the same in Anharic? Amharic. Do you have a letter with it? It's just. Ah. Amen.

[4 : 13] Means let it be. I'm trusting that. I'm agreeing with that. And. Apparently the root word for. Mammon. Or the Aramaic. Is to do with what you trust in.

What you think is certain. And secure. And definite. And you can build your life on it. And Jesus says. You can't. Serve God. And. This stuff.

This money stuff. That. People think that they can. Build their lives on. So what I. What I. Suggest we do. Is just look through this.

As best we can. Try and understand. As best we can. The implications of it. So we'll. We'll look at the context. We'll look at what Jesus is not saying. And what he is saying.

And we'll look at some of the practicalities. And at that point. I'll open it up for discussion. And see what people think. The way the practicalities work out. Is that. Is that all right with everybody? That's.

[5 : 09] What I'm proposing to do. So let's look at the context. Because I think it is. It was worth Roger. Reading out. That whole chapter. Because I think. The target that he has in mind.

Is the Pharisees. So these are the religious leaders. In the days of Jesus. And we tend to think. Of their main feature. Being that they were. Very much rule making people.

But that's not the only thing. That the New Testament. Has to say about them. So you noticed in chapter 16. Verse 14. It says.

The Pharisees. Who. Can you see it? 16, 14. They loved money. I found that quite interesting. So not only are they people. With a sort of rule base.

For their morality. But. They managed to fit into that. That they really love money. You know. They wear sharp suits. And they like nice cars.

[6 : 08] And they appreciate fine food. And I found. I suppose. In our terms. You might say. They're very middle class. You might put it in that way.

But certainly. They loved money. And. Looking at the context. Then. 16.

Verse 1. Jesus is speaking to his disciples. And he tells this story. About the shrewd manager. But clearly. 16, 14. The Pharisees are listening.

And they are the ones. Who loved money. And they didn't like. The story that Jesus told. 16, 19. No. Yeah. 16, 19. Is another story about money.

There's a rich man. Dressed in purple. And fine linen. And lives in luxury. And there is also. A beggar. Named Lazarus. So you get these two extremes. And then.

[7 : 04] In the world to come. The extremes are swapped over. And the beggar. Is comforted. And the man who had all the riches. Is in agony.

That's quite a. An unpleasant story really. But. Jesus. Is teaching this. So it's all to do with money. Isn't it? And you might.

At first glance. Wonder. Whether he is teaching. Salvation by works. You know. You can earn your way. Into money. You can earn your way. Into heaven. By giving away your money.

I don't think he's teaching that. But he is saying. That there is a strong connection. In terms of our attitudes. To money here. And our eternal destiny.

I think he's saying. That is a strong connection. Strong connection. In the way that we handle money. Now. And. How that will pan out. In terms of eternity.

[8 : 05] So one thing in the. Context. Is the Pharisees. And money. Another thing in the context. Is the role of the law. And the prophets.

So. Chapter 16. Verse 16. Jesus. Goes from money. To. The law. And the prophets. And he says. That. They. Prophesied. Until. John. And now. The good news. Of the kingdom. Is being preached. And. Jesus says.

Everyone is forcing. His way into it. So. Not quite sure. How that. Exactly. What he means. By that. But we notice. That that second story. Ends up.

With. The. Man in agony. Saying. Please go back. And tell my family. Please send. Someone back from the dead. To tell my family.

[8 : 59] And Abraham. In verse 29. Says. Well they have. Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them. And the. Chap says. No that's not good enough.

They need somebody. Sent back from the dead. And this. In verse 31. If they do not listen. To Moses and the prophets. They will not be convinced. Even if someone. Rises from the dead.

So interestingly. Jesus is connecting up. Attitudes from. The Hebrew scriptures. The law. And the prophets. And saying. Well if you're. Open to that.

Then you'll be open. To the kingdom. And if you're not open. To the law. And the prophets. Then you're not likely. To be open. To the kingdom. Things either. So there's something. About that. In the context.

And also. In the context. Interestingly. Pops in verse 18. Which is. Divorce. Anyone who divorces. His wife. And marries another woman.

[9 : 55] Commits adultery. And a man who marries. A divorced woman. Commits adultery. And I think. These all fit together. It's all to do. The pharisaic attitude. They didn't really.

Believe their own scriptures. And that's why. They didn't believe Jesus. They have a terrible attitude. To women. They feel. That they can divorce. Their wives.

Left right and centre. You know. They would. They had debates. As to. Whether. You know. If your wife. Burned the cooking. Whether that was sufficient. Grounds for divorce. And some of them said. Well not quite.

And others said. Well yes it is. And. So their attitude. To divorce. Jesus is criticising. And along with that. Their attitude. To money.

So that's the. The context of it. It's quite an interesting context. Isn't it. That that's the background. Against which he's. Saying this. So.

[10 : 51] He says. In this context. You cannot serve. Both. God. And money. You Pharisees. He's saying this in particular.

You say. You're. God's people. You've got your Old Testament. And you say. Oh we're standing firm on it. But you don't really believe it. And look at your attitude. To.

To women. It's a terrible attitude. And look at your attitude. To money. All fits together. It's not right. It's deeply wrong.

You cannot serve. God. And money. Well let's have a little. Think about what Jesus is. Not saying. So I've got some suggestions here.

I don't think he's saying. You can't have money. Certainly those aren't the words. That he uses.

[11 : 45] He doesn't say. You cannot have. Both God and money. He says you cannot serve. Both God and money. So. Let's.

Let's us off the hook a little bit. Because I think most of us have money. And he's not saying. It's a sin to have money. And I don't think he's saying.

It's a sin to earn money. In other words. He's not saying that. The right spiritual way. Is to be impoverished. And. To go around.

Begging. Or. Not working. And just trusting. Somehow that God will send you money. That you need. He's saying. No. That's not.

Not the point. It's not the way. Jesus himself. Earned a living. Didn't he. As a carpenter's son. We presume he did.

[12 : 46] And his disciples were fishermen. And I know that he said. Leave your nets. And I'll make you fishers of men. But when later on. They went back to fishing. He didn't say.

Well this is sinful for you. To be earning your living. And the whole of the Bible. Seems to say. That it's. It's a right thing. To earn your living. In a. In a responsible way.

We don't make an idol. Out of. Our work. But. It's. It's God's way. For. A laborer. To earn. His wages.

And it's not. Jesus isn't. Commanding us. To be homeless. And. To. Wander around. As if we're not.

Part of ordinary. Human society. In 1 Corinthians 11. 22. When he's. Discussing. The abuses. Of the Lord's Supper. He says. Don't you have. Your own houses. To eat and drink in.

[13 : 41] So. Jesus isn't saying. You've got to be. Poverty. Not possess anything. That's not what he's saying. And I don't think he's saying.

You should not. Enjoy things. In life. Do you turn to. 1 Timothy 4. Verses 1 to 5. 1 Timothy 4. Verses 1 to 5. Which says. Says.

The spirit. Clearly says. That in later times. Some will abandon the faith. And follow deceiving spirits. And things taught by demons.

Such teachings. Come through hypocritical liars. Whose consciences have been seared. As with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry.

[14 : 51] And order them to abstain. From certain foods. Which God created. To be received with thanksgiving. By those who believe. And who know the truth. For everything God created.

Is good. And nothing is to be rejected. If it is received. With thanksgiving. Because it is consecrated. By the word of God. And prayer. There. So.

Paul. In the bit I read. Who was an apostle of Jesus Christ. And therefore we don't believe. There's a contradiction. Between the teaching of Jesus. And the teaching of Paul.

Is saying. No. The Bible doesn't forbid. Ordinary human life. Like. Marrying. If. That's the calling God's given you. And.

Being a Christian. Doesn't mean. That you're not allowed. To. Enjoy. Food. That's. The devil. Who says that. And. Being a Christian.

[15:49] Doesn't mean. You can't enjoy. Watching cricket. Or football. Or. Reading a good book. Or enjoying. A lovely sunset. Or. Whatever it is.

You might enjoy. Because it says. Everything God created. Is good. And nothing is to be rejected. If it is received. With thanksgiving. And I've got another reference. Psalm 128.

So. That's. Pretty much. In the middle of the Bible. You'll find the Psalms. And. If you just. Go forwards. Or backwards. Until you get to 128. There's a rather lovely.

Psalm here. It's sort of typical. Of the Old Testament. Ideals. But I would like to say.

It's not. Contradicted. By the New Testament. The New Testament. Goes further than this. But it's not. Contradicted by it. Psalm 128. Blessed.

[16:47] Are. All. Who fear the Lord. Who walk in his ways. You will eat. The fruit of your labor. Blessings and prosperity. Or blessings and good. Will be yours.

Your wife. Will be like. A fruitful vine. Within your house. Your sons. Will be like. Olive shoots. Around your table. Thus is the man. Blessed. Who fears the Lord. May the Lord.

Bless you. From Zion. All the days. Of your life. May you see. The prosperity. Or the good. Of Jerusalem. May you live. To see. Your children's children. A rather beautiful.

Little picture. Of. Psalm 128. Other beautiful. Little picture. Of what it is. To be blessed. And. You can see.

That. It's. To do with. Honest work. Verse 2. You will eat. The fruit. Of your labor. It's to do. With. The richness. Of family life. Your wife. Will be like.

[17:44] A fruitful vine. Within your house. Your sons. Will be like. Olive shoots. Round your table. Table. So it's to do. With family life. And it's to do. With having a table.

Which is a piece of furniture. As I'm sure. You're well aware. And. He says. This is. This is the. This is. This is. The blessing. Of life.

Life doesn't get. Any better than this. Life on this earth. Doesn't get any better than this. To have. Your. Loved ones. With you. Perhaps.

To have. Family. To be able. To sit. Round a table. Presumably. With a roof. Over your head. And that's. That's blessing. Maybe even to see. Your grandchildren. It doesn't get.

Any better than that. And. I know. That God. Doesn't bless. Everybody. In that particular way. But here is. A picture. That. Is in the Bible. Of.

[18:38] What is good. And I would. Ventures. To suggest. That even. If you were. A multimillionaire. It still doesn't. Get any better. Than. To have your family. With you.

And perhaps. To see your grandchildren. And have a table. And to sit around it. And eat some food together. So I think the Bible. Is very pro. Ordinary human life. In that sense.

And Jesus isn't saying. You're not allowed. To have that. Let me try and. Put that. Carefully. Not everybody. Is called.

In exactly. The same way. Some people. Are called. To singleness. Yes. But. Nevertheless. Here is. The sort of blessing. That Jesus is not.

Forbidding us. He's not saying. You should not enjoy. Things like this. In life. Let's go back to Luke 16. So. What. Is he saying. Well.

[19:34] He is saying. You cannot. Serve. Both God and money. I know that. Because that's an exact quote. From the verse. He is saying that. But I would like to pick out. The word.

Serve. Because it's the word. For. Being a slave. Being a servant. Or. Particularly being a slave. You can't.

Be the slave. Of. Both. God. And. Mammon. A slave. Is somebody. Who the master says. Do this. And he does it. A slave is somebody. The master says. Come here. And he comes. Or go. And he goes. And you can't have. God. Telling you to come. And go.

And so on. And at the same time. Mammon. Money. Telling you. To do this. And don't do that. And come here. And so on. You can't.

[20:31] Have both. There is. There will bound to be a time. When God says. I do. Something.

Where God says. Do this. And mammon says. No. I don't give you permission. To do that. Well.

Who are you going to serve? Well. God says. Come. And mammon says. No. Well.

Who are you going to obey? Well. God says. Go. And mammon says. No. You stay here. Who are you going to obey? So. You might. For example.

Have the opportunity. To serve. For no money. And. God says. That's a good thing to do. But mammon says. Well. Where's the profit in that?

Well. Who are you going to obey? A friend of mine. Is an airline pilot. And because he's an airline pilot. He earns enough money.

[21 : 26] To work. I don't know. For half the week. Half the normal working week. He can survive on that. And he has the rest of the time. For serving in the church. He's made that a deliberate policy decision.

Mammon. I don't think he had mammon's permission. To do that. But God says. Yes. That's a good thing to do. We. Or mammon says.

Cutting corners to make a profit. Is a great idea. God says. No it isn't. So. The idea. When you go on the train. Of pretending.

You're a child. So that you can get half fair. I find that doesn't work as well. For me. As it used to. But it wasn't that number of years ago.

Actually. That Maria was charged half fair. To go into Osborne house. And she was indignant actually. But it's. Mammon says. That's cool. But God says.

[22 : 23] No it isn't. You can't serve God and mammon. And mammon will give instructions. For planning out your life. By such and such an age. You can be working.

So many hours. And getting so many thousands of pounds. And God says. Well that's not my plan. You can't serve God and mammon. Steve Timmis.

So I'll quote him. So that you know that it's his fault. And not mine. He says. Who do you serve? Do you feel uneasy. Awkward. Or irritated. About being told that your money.

Or your house. Or your car. Isn't yours. Did you say quietly to yourself. There's no way I'm going to stop spending. Ten pounds a day on cigarettes. Or no way I'm going to stop saving.

Two hundred pounds a month. For my kids education. Or no way I'm going to let people. Invade my home. Or there's no way I'm going to settle. For a cheap less prestigious phone. Well says Steve Timmis.

[23 : 18] The answers reveal. Who has your future. And what has your heart. And who you're serving. So he does say. You cannot serve. God and money.

Second thing I think he's saying is. You can't base your trust in money. So I'm thinking of mammon as being the thing you trust in.

You can't base your trust in money. This is a little bit more subtle. And I think the world around us would like to squeeze us into this mold.

Of putting our trust in money. So if you're progressing at all in your career. You'll be thinking about your pension. Or you may be actually drawing your pension.

The whole thing about making sure we're secure in older age. It's not that far away from what we are encouraged to put our whole trust in.

[24 : 24] And base our whole lives upon. That comment was sponsored by Viking River Cruises. Did you notice that when the banks nearly collapsed over the euro.

How indignant people were. Banks are there to be rock solid. They're our protectors.

Investments are our great certainties in life. They're the rock on which we build. How dare they even suggest that we won't get our money if we put our money in such and such a bank.

That is totally unacceptable. You see the whole thing is idolizing a financial system isn't it. This is like God. We put our trust in money.

And Jesus is saying well even though the world around you is doing that. And even though in a sense our society depends on it. Yet don't make it an absolute in your life.

[25 : 38] Don't get taken in by that. You can't base your trust in money. You can't both trust in money and in God. It's one or the other.

It's the one that you're trusting in. Third thing. You're not to love money. It's a famous verse often misquoted in the Bible. The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil.

Look at the Pharisees if you would in verse 14. It says these guys, what does it say? They loved money.

The word is philar guros. Philar guros. Which means lover of silver I think. They loved it.

Nothing gave them more pleasure than to go through their bank statements. Nothing gave them more pleasure than to check each week on the stock exchange.

[26 : 35] And see how their stocks and shares were doing. It was the bright spot in their weeks. Because they loved money. And notice the story, the second story in verse 19.

Look at what he says about the person whom he's critiquing. There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.

I did look up the word for luxury. Lampros. Lampros. Which means something like bright or shining. And we would say glittering, wouldn't we? The glitterati. The people who glitter as they make their way down the red carpet for the Oscars or whatever it is.

And he's saying that is the love of money. And you mustn't love money. Don't let it be said of you that you're characterized by the fineness of your clothes and the luxury in which you live.

[27 : 47] We must not love money. Use it, yes. Love it, no. And I'm thinking about the use it.

Because that's the idea of the story in the first part of chapter 16, isn't it? The guy has shrewdness in the way he uses money.

I could imagine when Jesus was telling that story about the cheating steward. I bet the people who were listening had a laugh as he was saying it.

And, you know, the man who, this steward who says, I've been given the sack. I'm not strong enough to dig and I'm ashamed to beg. And you could imagine the people saying, I know somebody like that.

You know, they're just thinking this. And the debtors are called in. And the cheating steward says, how much do you owe my master? 800 gallons of olive oil.

[28 : 51] Tell you what, we'll write it down. Cross out the eight, make it 400. Okay. And he's systematically cheating his master and using money in a certain way for a certain end result.

And the end result being that he's got friends who will welcome him when he's been given the sack. Jesus isn't commending cheating. But he's saying this stuff can be used for certain results.

And he's saying that the people of light are not to love money but shrewdly, almost as shrewd as that cheating steward to think, here's a good way, here's a good way to use that money.

Not to cheat anybody but to have a long-term beneficial effect. And we will come to that in a moment. We're not to love money but to use it. Fourth thing I think Jesus is saying is, he's saying, here's a surprise.

The money we have is actually not ours but entrusted to us. Look at 16:12 where Jesus is commenting on the story that he told.

[30 : 09] He says in verse 9, So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, in handling unrighteous mammon, 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? He's saying that this wealth that we have, this money that we have, these pounds and euros and dollars, actually aren't ours.

Seems a bit of a surprise. I thought it was ours. But Jesus, no, really, to understand it properly, it's something you've been entrusted with, like a steward, and you were to use it, knowing that it's not actually yours.

It's a bit of a surprise that. And the fifth thing I think he's saying is that we need to invest with true shrewdness.

And that, I think, is the point of the first story. What's a shrewd way? Shrewd, meaning wise, meaning clever, meaning sort of inventive.

[31 : 46] What's a shrewd way of using money in this world, given the context that there's a world to come?

Given the context that we've been given this short term as a loan to look after, it's not actually ours in an absolute sense, and given that there is another world coming, when lots of things will be reversed, and things that we thought were really valuable will turn out to be a very limited value, and things that we might have thought were a very limited value are actually extremely valuable. Given that that's the situation, how should we shrewdly invest? Well, I'll sort of leave that as a question for discussion. And my fourth heading is practicalities.

So I don't know what you think about this. I mean, what, how then should we, what should we do with money? Jesus doesn't say, make sure you've got zero money, give it all away.

Don't think he's saying that. He's saying, no, have money, earn money, use money, use money serving God, don't love money, be shrewd about it.

[33 : 09] How should we do that? What's the practical way of doing it? Well, one piece of practicality that's in the Bible is giving money away in a proportionate way. So, one rule of thumb that's certainly there in the Old Testament, and is worth bearing in mind in the New Testament, is tithing.

Have you heard of tithing? Tithing is a way of saying a tenth. And in the Old Testament, the people would give a tenth of their income to God.

And in New Testament times, a lot of Christians do a similar thing. Not a bad idea. It isn't actually commanded as such, but proportionate giving, that wouldn't be such a bad idea.

And the reason that it's helpful is if you haven't got very much money, you can still tithe. You can say, I haven't got very much, but what I have got, I'll set aside a tenth.

It's a tenth of your global income. It's not a tenth of what you've got left over when you've spent everything else. It's not, you know, you've got five pounds spending money when you've paid for everything else, 50p.

[34 : 18] It's a tenth of your global income. And so if you've got a small income, you can tithe. And if you've got a large income, you can tithe.

And it's never a wrong time to start tithing because even if it's just a small amount, you can start off doing it. So there's a practicality that I think is well worth considering.

And if you've never considered it, now would might be a good time to do so. And here's another piece of advice. Somebody will be able to tell us who said this. Make all you can.

Make all the money you can. Save all you can. So if you can get the same thing in Aldi that you might have got in Waitrose, cheaper.

Save money. Save all you can. And give all you can. Who said that? Correct, John Wesley. Yes. So that's good advice.

[35 : 18] So practicalities. I'm going to stop there. I hope that's been a little bit helpful at least. Anybody got any thoughts on then how we could serve... We can't serve God and money, but how we can put that into practice.