

Journey to the Cross: Parable of the Dishonest Manager - Luke 16:1-13

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Preacher: Jayson Turner

[0 : 00] Alright, well good morning church. Good morning church. I am currently living in a bit of a Petri dish at home. So I sound a little froggy and hopefully I won't be a distraction this morning, but it's good to be here. I just got a good report that John is conscious and responsive and Melissa and Emily are with him and so that's a praise. Amen. So go ahead and turn open to Luke chapter 16. We're going to be looking at verses 1 through 13 this morning.

And let me just open our time asking the Lord to meet with us and speak to us and help us where we have need this morning. So join me as we pray. As the psalmist writes, Lord, as the deer pants for flowing streams so pants our soul for you God. We thirst for you for the living God and Lord this morning we desire to hear from you to meet with you to experience something of your presence. Lord, I pray that that would have been felt already in just the body coming together.

Lord us being your hands and feet and encouragement to one another. Lord, thank you that we you have not left us here to do faith on our own. But Lord, you've called us into a family and in particular to this local family, fourth memorial. Lord, we thank you for the gift of being a church. Lord, we thank you for the gift of your word that you speak to us and you tell us things about yourself that we might know you and we might know how to live this life that you have called us to as your people. We ask that you would speak to us this morning. Lord, I pray that you would fill me with your spirit with unction and clarity and Lord that we will have a sense that we have met with you because of this time. We love you Jesus. It's your name we pray. Amen. Well, today we are going to be considering another parable of Jesus as he told these stories. Big part of his ministry. He's on his final journey here to Jerusalem. And yet again, we have another parable. What is a parable? A parable. Many Bible teachers have called it an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. I think of parables as allegories wrapped in narrative. And today we have one of the more perplexing of these stories. The sort of story that would shock the listeners. Much like when Jesus talked about the good Samaritan. If you were a Jew of the day and you're thinking a good Samaritan, be like the Samaritan. What are you talking about Jesus? So Jesus often used these stories to shock his followers unto truth. Well, today he's going to be telling us a story, a non-negotiable in terms of us living as his kingdom people. And so the sermon title, you have two options. You can call it the dishonest manager, or you can call it creative accounting. I'll let you choose. Our passage contains two parts. We have the parable itself in verses one through eight a. And then we have the lesson and application in verses eight B, the second part through verse 13. So those are the two sections and Jesus actually gives us three applications of this. What some have said is one of the more difficult parables to understand. Well, let's get after it and see how we do this morning. So beginning here in verse one. 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. So the story that we have before us, we have two main characters. We have a rich man, a landowner, and he has hired a manager to oversee, administrate his estate. And this would have been typical in

Jesus day for the wealthy, especially those with much land to function in this way. If we were to think about it in modern terms, think about a Fortune 500 company, an owner of the company hiring a CEO, CEO, maybe some executive vice presidents to run his company. And that's the narrative that we have before us. And no doubt this manager had both great responsibility, but also great freedom.

This is a trusted employee of this rich man. Now, the first question we have to ask is what sort of executive leader is this manager? Well, we find out right off the bat, not a very good one. The manager is actually accused, perhaps by someone else within the household, the organization of doing a poor job. In fact, it says charges were brought to him brought to the owner that the man was wasting his possessions. So this individual was misappropriating funds, using his expense count for unnecessary purchases. I don't think this is so unusual in our world. I've had the occasion as I Uber drive to drive a number of consultants or visiting business people in town, in particular when I was in Seattle. And I would often hear them brag about the food and the alcohol and the niceties that they were enjoying on the company's dime. Oftentimes, while not entertaining clients, sort of this vegas mentality, what happens on a business trip stays on a business trip. And so perhaps this manager that we meet here, he has become too familiar with his master, careless with the freedom and the responsibility that had been entrusted to him. This owner, master of the house, he gets wind of this, what's going on right under my nose? And how does he respond? And before we see his response, just as an aside, it's interesting that Jesus describes this manager in the exact same terms that he used when talking about the prodigal. We considered last week. In fact, the prodigal was described in Luke 15:13, the younger son squandered his property in reckless living. This individual, this manager was wasting his possessions. It's the same Greek word. And so you wonder if the listeners are thinking to themselves, Oh, I know how this owner is going to respond to this manager. He's going to forgive him. He's going to be kind to this scoundrel, just like the father did to the wayward son. Well, let's see. Let's look at verse two together. 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. Whoa. Story gets very, it goes very differently for this individual. This man is being held accountable for his lack of care and managing the owner's affairs. And he is now in a desperate situation. Anybody ever lost their job before? And all of a sudden you're thinking to yourself, Well, how am I going to make ends meet? How am I going to pay the bills that I have? How is this going to work out? And for this individual, he's now having to think about how am I going to explain this to my wife and the reasons for my termination? Well, all of a sudden this manager is faced with a heavy dose of reality. He is in a world of hurt that he created for himself. He's been fired. Now what does he do? Well, let's read. Look at verse three.

[9 : 36] 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. So first he considers a couple options. And both of them seem rather bad to him. You know, I could go out and do manual labor, but I've been sitting at a desk for a long time. And I'm not strong enough. I can't go that road.

Or I could go out, I could get a piece of cardboard, stand on the intersection, and I could beg. But that's just a little bit too embarrassing. So this individual with a decent amount of intellect, business savvy, he hatches a plan. He has a light bulb moment, if you will. And this is the plan that he comes up with. Let's look at verses four to seven. I have decided what to do. So that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses. So summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, How much do you owe my master? He said 100 measures of oil.

He said to him, Take your bill, sit down quickly and write 50. Then he said to another, How much do you owe? He said 100 measures of wheat. He said to him, Take your bill and write 80. So what's the plan? The plan of this individual is that he's going to ingratiate himself to his debtors. Those that are leasing land from the wealthy owner. And he's doing that that he would have then a softer landing, as he is removed from his position, either they will take me into their home, and they will take care of me, or perhaps they will hire me. I scratch your back, you scratch mine. And within this culture, this would have been typical for a landowner to have payment made from shares of the produce, the crops of those leasing land. For the first debtor, instead of paying the owner 1000 measures of oil, with an equivalent to 800 gallons of olive oil, cut your bill in half. And it's a substantial bill 800 gallons of olive oil is yielded from around 150 trees. And for the second debtor, instead of 100 measures of wheat, we've been equivalent to 1000 bushels of wheat, make that bill 800 bushels. That would have been a yield of about 100 acres. Would the debtors appreciate this?

Yes, of course they would. This is a considerable amount that is being discounted. Here's where this story takes a major plot twist. And it's in the response of the landowner. Like he's already fired this manager. He found out about the discounts. This new X manager has given to those that owed him money. Who's going to foot the bill? The owner. If you were the owner, how would you be feeling about your ex employee at this point? What would you want to do with him? You'd probably be pretty upset. Or worse, you've been taken advantage of. I had an occasion when I was younger, first married, bought a pickup. I thought it was going to be a beautiful car and I get the title in the mail.

And all of a sudden it said branded across it. And I didn't really know what that was at the time. I'm young. I'm married. I'm in love. Everything's perfect. And come to find out. This was a total vehicle. And the guy was so convincing that it was a great car and I had been taken advantage of.

[14 : 08] Man, that guy got me. I was a sucker. And that's what's going on here with this landowner. But his response is surprising to us. Let's look at it versus verse eight, first part.

Says the master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. What? Notice he doesn't commend him for being dishonest, but he's impressed with this guy. His ingenuity, his cleverness, his shrewdness. This is an entrepreneur giving props to another entrepreneur for being business savvy at the 11th hour. This is not the praise anyone listening expected. You're praising that guy?

What? It'd be like me commending probably the worst position in government is being the press secretary, right? It'd be like me commending the press secretary, right? For being able to spin truth, admiring this individual for thinking on their feet, admiring them for avoiding answering questions all the while convincing the people asking questions that they're out of line. Like there's great skill in that. Our fourth daughter, when she was five, I heard her in the kitchen and come into the kitchen and then she had left and I get there and there is like spilled milk in front of the refrigerator. And I know that she was in there and typically I would be upset like just clean it up. Why are you being lazy? But I couldn't be upset with her because as I looked down on the ground, there was made a little sign like a sandwich board and on it it said caution spilled milk. And I'm thinking to myself, you know, it'd been a lot faster to take a wet towel and just wipe that up. But no, no, the just the genius to warn all the other family members that there is spilled milk in the kitchen. Well, this owner, he recognizes brilliance and resourcefulness and he applauds it. This manager who had never thought about the future, he lived only for the moment.

All of a sudden he gets very serious about his future. And the wealthy owner says, well done. And we could say it this way, a life of squandering turned very quickly into a life of strategy.

Here's a lesson that Jesus has for us in the second part of verse eight. He says, for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

[17 : 29] The unbeliever is more thoughtful in pursuing the temporary than the Christian investing in eternity.

Walter Martin, the great apologist said it this way, the cults do more for a lie than believers do for the truth. You heard that before? Yeah. Like Mormons will send out conscripts, all these young men and they'll go out on mission. It's obligatory, two years. And just as we think about the average unbeliever living for the now, they do it with great zeal. Thursday night I had an occasion to drive some folks from the airport to their house and they were just getting back from a cruise I learned and talking to them a little bit and they're saying, oh yes, this is the third cruise in the last 12 months. And I was sort of shocked. And I said, wow, that sounds like a new hobby. And they said, no, no, no, this is our 12th cruise. And I was like, so taken aback, this couple is committed to their leisure, like they're zealous for their leisure, right?

The unbeliever is very zealous for the things of this world. I got a call a couple weeks ago from New York. It was another passenger of mine had my business card. I was getting excited, left a message, I thought, oh, he's going to tell me he responded to the gospel, he's in a good church. No, that was not the conversation. I call him back, he's like, yeah, I remember you were my Uber driver in Seattle. I'm starting a business. And I wondered if you wanted to get in on the ground floor, right? But I just had to give this guy props like he is like on it. He's being aggressive with trying to build his business, thinking about the temporary. When it comes to sin, the unbeliever is very committed church. I've had enough conversations to talk with, especially young men, motivated and resourceful in finding a companion for the evening using one of the current apps of the day. And I had, I've had multiple conversations on this asking the young men, now how does this work? And they say, well, you swipe right and then they'll respond back.

And I said, so when you find a gal like that you like, I mean, is it just you just find one and that's it? Like, Oh, no, no, no. No, you swipe as many as you can. It's like the law of averages, like you swipe right like about 100 times, you're gonna get one that wants to hang out with you, hang out with you. And I said, so it's kind of like fishing. He's like, totally. The unbeliever is zealous to feed their flesh. Church, this parable is a call for us to engage in this life well for the sake of God's kingdom, to be zealous for the things of God. And what's interesting about this parable, it is both a contrast as well as a comparison parable. It's a contrast in that don't be like the dishonest manager who only cared about the temporary. Don't be like him in that regard. But as a comparison parable, and that we're told to be like the dishonest manager, who became shrewd about his future. Only for us, we need to think about our future a little bit further ahead. Eternity. And what I love about this story, Jesus is not commending the dishonesty, he's commending the shrewdness. That this guy engaged his mind. And I love that this is a call to reminder for us as Christians that we're not lemmings, that we're supposed to use our intellect, that we're supposed to be thoughtful in the ways in which we carry out this life. And we're to do it in such a way where we make the greatest dent into eternity. Amen? That's what this story is teaching us. And Jesus then goes on and gives us three applications for how this thing, how we apply it in the everyday. First one comes to us in verse nine.

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

[22 : 35] Huh? That's why commentators and Bible teachers have a hard time with this parable. Let me just condense that. What is Jesus saying here? He's saying, use wealth, use the wealth of your resources to advance the gospel. Use the wealth of your resources to advance the gospel. Use unrighteous wealth to win people to Christ. And this word unrighteous wealth or unrighteous mammon is just talking about the currency of the age. It's temporary.

It's of this earth. Temporary wealth is not talking about us somehow gaining money through dishonest means as though, oh, we have this rich initiative going on. Let's go rob a bank. And then we can like pay off like, you know, the amount we're trying to raise. It's just talking about currency of our age. Rather make friends, converts through using every resource the Lord has entrusted to you. So use your time, use your talents, use your treasures and have an eternal perspective in terms of how you're investing that which has been entrusted to you. And if you do those friends, they will transcend this life. The money won't fact it says it will fail. But it says they may receive you into eternal dwellings. Those that have come to faith in Christ, it's a picture of reunion. I had the occasion to lead this elderly woman Betty to faith in Christ. Back on the west side when I was pastoring there. And I took the time I drove to the hospital. I gave her my time. It didn't cost a lot, but I paid for parking and I didn't have to go. But I went.

And she responded to the gospel. And she's now with the Lord. And she is my friend that I will see someday. And that's the picture here. The picture of reunion, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. Just like during Christmas time, many of you put together these Christmas boxes.

What a blessing that someday you may enter into eternity and you may meet a man or a woman who came to faith as a child. Through the gift of this box, you spent your resources, you put the thing together, you included the gospel message in there, and they came to faith in Christ. And now they're welcoming you. Like they went ahead. It's a beautiful picture here.

Will it be worth it? Yes. Yes. We're pouring dollars into an outreach center. Why? So that we can see people come to meet the Lord. And so use your mind, use your intellect, your imagination for how you could invest in others through that particular resource. I think Scott's given us a list of ideas of how we could actually utilize that space.

[26 : 02] Use that which the Lord has entrusted to us. And maybe you're thinking, Jay, I don't have a lot. Well, use what you have. Some of you were super blessed because you actually read the hiding place this last couple of months. It's so good. We had a great discussion. Some of you guys missed out. No, no, no, no. I love this section in here where Cory's talking about her mother who had failing health, but whatever, whatever energy she the Lord had given to her, she used to be a blessing to others. And Cory never thought of herself as poor because they're always serving people. Use what you have. Cory writes, when she was a younger girl, she said, we were going to see one of the many poor families in the neighborhood who mama had adopted. It never occurred to any of us children that we ourselves were poor. The poor were people you took baskets to.

Mama was always cooking up, nursing broths and porridge for forgotten old men and pale young mothers on days that is when she herself was strong enough to stand at the stove.

Isn't that good? Whatever the Lord has entrusted to you. And this story goes on to talk about how this watch shop that her family ran in the Netherlands, it became this ministry outpost.

And a lot of that had to do with her father that he walked with the Lord and he ministered to people as they came in. He used his place of business as a place to actually minister. It says here at the beginning of World War II and when things were just chaos there in Holland, it says for five days, Holland held out against the invader Germany. We kept the shop open not because anyone was interested in watches, but because people wanted to see father. Some wanted him to pray for husbands and sons stationed at the borders of the country. Others, it seemed to me just came to see him sitting there behind his workbench as he had for 60 years and to hear the ticking clocks in a world of order and reason. Whatever the Lord has given to you, whatever he's entrusted you with, be zealous to use those things for his purposes. That's the point.

Let's go on. Look at the second application Jesus has here, verses 10 through 12. He says, one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much. And one who is dishonest and very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have been faithful in the unrighteous earthly wealth, who will entrust you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

[29 : 09] What's being talked about here? The way that I would say it is this, the lives that we live now they matter in eternity. The lives that we live now, they matter in eternity. Somehow our present investment impacts the responsibilities, the rewards that we will experience, receives in heaven.

The rewards that we will experience, receives in heaven. We have this image of a judgment seat for believers, the Bema Seat in 1 Corinthians 3, not for salvation, but our lives will be tested in terms of what we did for the sake of the gospel and how we built our lives.

Did we use precious materials, gold and silver and precious stones? Or do we use wood and hay and straw? Things that just burn and our lives will be tested. So yes, the lives we live now, they matter in eternity. And maybe you've never thought in terms of this idea of rewards and maybe you thought, well I can't think about rewards in heaven, that's kind of fleshly, right? Like Jesus would never talk about rewards and yet He does. Let me read you a few verses here, Matthew 512.

He says, rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven. Huh, the Bible indicates there is future rewards in heaven. 1 Corinthians 3, 14, the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 2 John 8, watch yourselves so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. And consider what Jesus says at the end of the Bible.

Revelation 22, 12, behold, I'm coming soon and bringing my recompense, my reward with me, to repay each one for what He has done. So Scripture talks about a future reward, that the lives we live now has nothing to do with salvation, but has to do with some sort of reward. Well, Jake, what's the reward? I don't fully know, but Scripture seems to indicate that it has something to do with responsibilities the Lord will entrust to us someday. Revelation 2, 26 says it this way, speaking to the church at Thyatira says, the one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. So it sounds like there's some sort of responsibility the Lord will entrust to those that have been faithful in this life to live out His purposes.

[32 : 14] Maybe it's positions in the kingdom. We have this parable of the 10 minas in Luke 19. It says in verse 16, the first came before him saying, Lord, your minas have made 10 minas more.

And he said to him, well done, good servant, because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over 10 cities. I don't know what the responsibilities are going to be.

We rule over cities, planets, I don't know. But it's just, it's fascinating to me that Scripture actually talks about that, that the lives we live now, they're going to impact somehow the responsibilities the Lord will entrust to us in eternity. I think probably the greatest reward is just the fact that the Lord delights when He sees us. Right? It's that parable of the talents from Matthew 25 where he says, well done. Isn't that what you want to hear? Well done, good and faithful servant. That's what I want to hear. And maybe you've lived your life in Christ, sort of meandering around, not really committed to the things of the Lord.

Like, yeah, I can't start now. Yes, you can. And maybe the word is not, you know, well done. Maybe the word from the Lord is, hey, you finish well. You finish well. Way to finish strong.

To hear that from the living God spoken to you? Nothing better. Nothing better. So don't be guilty of having the mindset that today won't impact your eternity. It will. Not unto salvation, but unto reward. So today, church, be faithful. Be generous with all that the Lord has entrusted to your care. Let's look at this final application here in verse 13.

[34 : 12] 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.

I mean, that seems pretty clear, church. Amen. Amen. I mean, just because I sound like a frog doesn't mean you guys have to, right? Church, there's room in each of our hearts for only one kingdom.

Please note, Jesus doesn't say you should not serve God and money. What does he say? You cannot. It's an impossibility. You can't have divided loyalties and it work.

And if you have divided loyalties, what happens is things get hard and you will opt for the kingdom of the flesh. Recall the purpose of wealth. Paul said in Ephesians 4, 26, he said, let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing his honest work with his own hand, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. The wealth is just a resource.

It's a resource to use for ministry. Whether it's your time, whether it's your talent, whether it's your treasure, J, my bank account is shrinking. I can't get the debt snowball to go where it should. You have time. You have talent. What are you using those things for?

[36 : 00] What are you using that imagination for? There's room in each of our hearts for only one kingdom. To be God's kingdom people means that we would be a generous people versus the Pharisees who were, by the way, listening.

They heard what Jesus was saying here. They love this world. They love the temporary. They spent their wealth on maintaining their temporary status, pleasure, church. They hated this story that Jesus is telling because they were committed to living for the present. In fact, we know they hated it because in the next verse, even though it's not in what we're going to cover, I'm going to sneak it in. Verse 14, the Pharisees who were lovers of money heard all these things and they ridiculed him.

They ridiculed him. We love our lives. We love living for the now. And Jesus was messing with their lifestyles. The gospel was altering lives and they didn't like it because they didn't want to change. Church, people see the King when we live out his heart before them. Amen. When we're a generous people, people know something of a generous God.

The gospel is the generosity of God to all people. And once you've tasted of God's mercy, it ought to change everything. Instead of having a zeal now for the things of the world to try to just satisfy, indulge my flesh, I now have a zeal to live for the Lord, to experience the joy of being useful in His hands. There's great joy in that. When the Lord would use your life to be a blessing to another, what's the way that you're able to serve them, whether they're able to speak words of life to them? Let me tell you about my Savior.

He is a God that loves to forgive sinners and let me tell you about Him. I need to save your bad. By the way, so do you. You know, what's interesting to me is this story. It actually follows directly on the heels of the story about the prodigal, whose lifestyle mimicked the unjust manager, who was the first to be in the church. The first time I've seen this connection here, I was like, I wonder if Jesus intended this. I mean, He is the master teacher after all.

[39 : 06] And it's as if He did this intentionally, right? The zeal that you had for sin, and now that you know the kindness of the Father, be the best son you possibly can be.

It is the experience of the gospel that allows us to now live in this new way. It's beautiful. We know a generous God.

It allows a thing to be generous with all that He's entrusted to us in the now. Amen? I think Jim Elliott said it better than anyone when he said, he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

Father, thank you for this story. Lord, we want to be a people zealous for you, for using our lives well in the here and now, not squandering the intellects, the resources, the gifting that you've entrusted to us.

Lord, we want to be a church that is zealous for you, for the gospel. Lord, would you grow in us an urgency reminding us that eternity is forever and that we can impact that in the way in which we live now?

[40 : 48] Lord, we exist around people that presently are on their way to hell. They have never met the kindness of the good shepherd. They have never experienced the forgiveness of the Father.

Jesus, you died. Jesus, you died to make sinners into sons and daughters. And Lord, we are blessed to be called your people.

Lord, give us a mindset to live in light of not just the now, Lord, but to live in light of eternity. This life is a vapor. It's very short.

Would you give us a mindset and Lord, give us creativity in terms of how we might use that which you have entrusted to us for the sake of others, for the joy that's lacking, that they would come to know you as their own personal Savior.

Lord, we love you, Jesus. Thank you that you take care of us in your name. We pray. Amen.