

# The Response of a Generous Heart

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're reading this morning from Luke chapter 16, which, if you've got one of the old church Bibles on you, is on page 1054, and might be on the screen in a minute.

He also said to the disciples, that is Jesus, there was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions.

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. And the manager said to himself, what shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me?

I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I'm removed from management, people may receive me into their homes. So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, how much do you owe my master?

He said, a hundred measures of oil. He said to him, take your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty.

[ 1 : 26 ] Then he said to another, and how much do you owe? He said, a hundred measures of wheat. He said to him, take your bill and write eighty.

The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

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

One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much. And one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.

If then you have not been faithful with the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

[ 2 : 28 ] 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. Good morning everyone.

Lovely to see you. Please do keep Luke chapter 16 open. And let me pray for us as we begin. Let's pray. Luke tells us that he writes to give us certainty about the things we've been taught.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, the Bible. Thank you for Luke's gospel. Thank you for this extraordinary privilege we have of hearing the voice of the living God this morning.

And we pray that you would indeed grant us certainty about the things that we've been taught and know about the Lord Jesus. And we ask it in his name.

[ 3 : 38 ] Amen. Well, I wonder how good you are handling money. I know it's not really the kind of thing which we like to talk about in polite company.

But how wise, how trustworthy even are you when it comes to dealing with money? I imagine most of us in this room would probably like to think that we handle money pretty well.

It may well be that you spend most of your working week dealing with money. I guess all of us like to tell each other of a bargain that we found online somewhere. Most of us, I guess, would regard ourselves as being trustworthy with money.

But the question that this parable we're looking at this morning forces us to ask is, how good are we handling money really? You'll see on the outline that the way we use our money and resources reveals the state of our hearts.

It shows both what we believe about the future, and it also shows where we really stand with God. Now, we're picking up our series in Luke's Gospel from where we left off in January.

[ 4 : 55 ] This central section, if you remember, that begins with the question back in chapter 13, verse 23. If you turn to it, 13, 23. Lord, will those who are saved be few?

And the answer, verse 29, people will come from east and west and north and south into Jesus' kingdom. Indeed, in 14, 23, Jesus pictures God sending out his servants into the hedgerows and highways to show people the invitation is really for them.

And then we saw in chapter 15, what is it that makes God joyful? In chapter 15, verse 10, just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Now, it may be that you're here this morning and you're simply looking in on the Christian faith, in which case the implication of those three parables that Jesus told about lost things, the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, is that God is calling you to repent and to turn back to him.

And Jesus assures us of the warm, arms-open, wide welcome that we get when we do that. But for the rest of us, notice that chapter 16, verse 1, is directed to Jesus' disciples.

[ 6 : 26 ] In other words, this is the main thing he wants us, if we are followers of Jesus, the majority of us wants to take away from these parables about lost things. Jesus wants us to use our resources in line with what we've seen of God's priorities, in line with the very thing that gives God joy.

He wants us to put our resources to work, to bring people into his kingdom. It's why I've called this series God's Heart and Ours.

God's Heart, we saw that in chapter 15, the parable of the lost son especially. But now in these next three talks, very much our own hearts are addressed.

So two points this morning. Firstly, the way you handle your resources shows what you believe about the future. Now this parable the Lord Jesus tells in verses 1 to 9 has been described as one of the most difficult of Jesus' parables to understand.

So we're going to have to work hard this morning, and it's never a bad thing to have to work hard at understanding what the Bible says. In verses 1 and 2, Jesus introduces Mr. Dishonest.

[ 7 : 48 ] Have a look at those verses. He also said to the disciples, There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought against him that this man was wasting his possessions.

And he called him and said to him, What is this I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager. Mr. Dishonest works for a rich man who employs him to run his business.

It's time for his annual appraisal, and he's fired because he is dishonest. So he quickly makes some phone calls.

After all, we're told in verse 3, His prospects are not great. He's never done a day's manual labor in his life, and he's too proud to sit on the street selling the big issue.

And so he comes up with a plan. Verse 4, I've decided what to do, so that when I'm removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.

[ 8 : 52 ] And therefore, in his last few hours in post, he decides to prepare for his future. In verses 5 to 7, he summons some of the customers who owe money to the business, and one by one, he reduces their debts, in some cases, by as much as a half.

Now, the key verses which help us to understand the point of the parable come in verses 8 and 9, and that's why I just want us to focus for the next few minutes.

Have a look at Jesus' surprising explanation in verse 8. The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.

Notice he's not commended for being dishonest. Okay, can I say that again? He's not commended for being dishonest.

The heading in this particular version of the Bible, therefore, it's actually very unhelpful, isn't it? The editors have called it the parable of the dishonest manager, as if Jesus told the parable to encourage dodgy business practices.

[ 10 : 06 ] But no, if I say, Jesus commends him not for his dishonesty, but for his shrewdness. I guess in the same way that you might watch Alan Sugar, Sir Alan Sugar, on The Apprentice, and you might well say to yourself, you know, frankly, there are plenty of things I really don't like about this man.

He's aggressive, he's a bully, he's a bruiser, and yet I cannot deny that he is shrewd as a businessman.

The word shrewd means sensible, discerning, astute, wise. Because you see, the shrewd manager, what does he do?

He sees what the future has in store, and he acts now in the light of that future. He sees he's going to be unemployed, penniless, and so he acts in the present to ensure that he has friends who will welcome him and look after him in the future.

In fact, this kind of acting in the light of the present today, it's just what the world does all the time. As Jesus says in the second half of verse 8, for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

[11:37] Notice what the Lord Jesus is saying there, that actually unbelievers, people who aren't Christians, are actually far more shrewd, far wiser in their dealing with money than Christians are.

In other words, they see what they want in the future, a bigger house, a particular lifestyle, a successful career, a large pension pot, or to be a successful sports person, or something like that, and they take action now to get it.

They work two jobs, they study long hours, they train hard, they sacrifice other things. Here's Steve Jobs, the former CEO of Apple Computer, speaking a few years before his death.

For the past 33 years, I've looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself, if today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I'm about to do today?

Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life, because everything just falls away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important.

[12:48] Can we see what he's saying? So let's ask the question, what is truly important? What is truly important to God?

Sinners repenting, finding forgiveness. It's what we saw back in January, the angels rejoicing. As we'll see next week, there is a heaven, and there is a hell.

There's a separation in the next life, based on how people respond to Jesus in this life. So, here's the question. Does your use of money, does your use of resources reflect that future to come?

That is the shrewdness that the Lord Jesus is speaking about. That future should shape our present use of money, wealth, and resources.

Jesus continues, verse 9, And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

[14:00] Now, that phrase, unrighteous wealth, doesn't mean ill-gotten gains. Rather, it's unrighteous because of the attitudes that it can generate.

And it doesn't just refer to money, but the sum of all our stuff. So, money, yes, but also investments, property, possessions, our stuff.

And the point is, they will fail us. They may fail us during our lifetime, we might lose our job, our savings may fall, our pension pot may not be worth what we want it to be.

But if it doesn't fail us in this life, it will, of course, certainly fail us when we die. We cannot take it with us. I've got a few pounds worth of old French francs at home.

I don't know why I've kept them, but anyway, next time I go to France, if I go into a cafe and order a coffee and give them some of my old French francs, I guess I'll be told in no uncertain terms, they are worthless.

[15:09] France only accepts euros. The point is, I didn't use them when I could have done, and now they have no value whatsoever.

They have failed me. And the Lord Jesus is saying, the day will come when our wealth, our savings, our possessions, our property, our pension funds will be just like that.

They will fail us. They will be worthless. But that doesn't mean they are useless, because they can be put to excellent, eternal use now.

They can be used, verse 9, if you look at verse 9, to make friends for yourself. And that is explained at the end of the verse.

Friends who will receive us into God's eternal dwellings. It's a picture, I guess, of the welcome party, which there might be for us in heaven.

[16:14] And I wonder who might be part of that welcome party. Well, I guess among those, those who, humanly speaking, are in God's kingdom, God's heavenly kingdom, because of the way we have used our money and our resources.

And so they're there to welcome us when we get there. Think perhaps of an Italian in Naples who's heard the message of Jesus at Neapolis Church, one of our partner churches.

Think perhaps of a teenager in Streatham who's heard the gospel, who's responded to the gospel because of the youth work at Holy Redeemer, Streatham, another of our partner churches.

Think of a pastor in Zambia who's been trained and equipped for a lifetime of faithful ministry through Proclamation Institute Zambia.

Or think even of Betty in Ireland who we heard, didn't we, a few weeks ago had come to put her trust in the Lord Jesus. Or perhaps people in Dulwich who will welcome us and be in that welcome party in heaven and thank us for the money and resources we put into Grace Church Dulwich because actually that's how they heard the gospel and put their trust in the Lord Jesus.

[17:37] And I guess we can, some of us, we can multiply that welcome party as we think about other gospel initiatives and individuals that some of us will support individually.

Now let's not get Jesus wrong. This is not about buying our way into heaven. But it is about using our wealth and resources shrewdly in a way that produces fruit and will last into eternity.

And therefore I think it's worth asking ourselves this question. If a casual observer were to look at your wealth and resources, your home extension, the gadgets in your house, the badge on your car, and just so that we are inclusive of the smug savers, then the size of your pension pots and investments and all those things as well, would they think that you believe in another world to come or would they simply imagine that this world is all you believe in?

Now clearly for some the parable is a rebuke. If you're following Jesus and if you're simply living in the light of the present as if there is no future, then can you see how inconsistent you are being?

You can learn a thing or two from this shrewd manager. But I take it for others, actually this parable should be a real encouragement because actually we do give generously to gospel work and gospel ministry.

[19:22] You're shrewd. You've worked out that actually your resources will fail you and yet used wisely how they can have a great impact for eternity.

And therefore for some actually this parable should be a real and genuine encouragement. So firstly the way you handle your resources shows what you believe about the future.

Secondly the way you handle your resources shows where you stand with God. Verse 10. One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much.

And one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. Now if you and I are to understand what the Lord Jesus is saying in these verses we need to grasp the essential fact that our money and resources and possessions are not ours.

They belong to God and they're given to us on trust. Hence the repetition. Did you notice it when it is read to us earlier? Hence the repetition of the word faithful in verse 10.

[20:31] It's there again in verse 11. It's there in verse 12. It's made even clearer in fact isn't it in verse 12 where Jesus says our possessions don't belong to us but to another.

We are stewards of our money and resources not its owners. a number of years ago as a family we were given a family tour of the houses of parliament by a peer in the house of lords.

He was a man who had been very successful professionally successful as a politician and once the tour was over he took us to the smart tea room and very kindly bought us coffee and lovely cakes.

Now I protested but he insisted and he said it's all his it's all God's and therefore although money is temporary it is a test of our faithfulness it's a test of our character because verse 10 the principle is there isn't it little things in life reflect the big things so if a parent sends a child off to the shops to buy some orange juice and gives them some money to buy the orange juice and they come back with apple juice and probably not nearly enough change then they're not going to be entrusted with a similar or larger task in the future but actually if they come back with the orange juice and come back with what seems to be the right amount of change then they will be entrusted with bigger things in the future because little things in life reflect the big things I wonder if you can see that it follows that part of the beauty of what the Lord Jesus is saying here actually is that this applies to all of us however little or however much we have all of us are rich I guess by global standards many of us are rich by the standards of London but it may be that some of us actually have very limited resources you don't earn a huge amount of money or you're in the youth group jam and dependent upon your parents we may not have much but even those of us who don't have much can still be faithful in what we do have well what are the implications of this principle verses 11 and 12 if then you have not been faithful with the unrighteous wealth who will entrust to you the true riches and if

