

# Kingdom Investments

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Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Our passage this morning is hard, and it makes it harder to be distracted while I'm reading it, I'm sure. But it's a hard passage to grasp, to even interpret, or to understand even.

It's widely accepted to be perhaps the most difficult parable of Jesus, of his many parables that he told. But I think it might be helpful for us, first of all, to pay close attention.

So I invite you to open your Bibles to Luke 16, verse 1 to 13. It's page 1040 in your pew Bible. It might also be helpful for us to first say a few words about how we should read parables.

That is, what they are and what they aren't. Now, Jesus used parables at times to persuade, or to entice, or to challenge his hearers.

Parables are meant to be persuasive, they're meant to have a persuasive impact. And it is this primarily that we should look for when we read them. Ask yourself this question when you're reading the parables in the Gospels.

[1:19] What is the main question Jesus is seeking to answer? Or what is the truth about his kingdom he's seeking to disclose to us? And we also have to be careful when we read them not to stretch the parable beyond what is written, and how it's meant to function for us.

For example, it's not going to be helpful for us to take the parable of the sower, which we all are probably familiar with, and say, what if the sower goes in and does some weeding, ungodening, instead of allowing the weeds to, you know, grow up and choke the good seed?

That was not mentioned in the parable. And that wouldn't be helpful for us to stretch the parable beyond what is given. That would be stretching the parable beyond the scope of what Jesus meant to teach us in it.

And doing so will probably take us up on a rabbit trail, away from the main truth that Jesus will have us see in the parable. That's true for the parable of the sower.

That's true for this parable as well. Now, we shall have this in mind as we look at this parable of the dishonest manager. Now, let me say at the outset, I'm going to repeat this.

[2:37] The fact that this manager was praised does not mean that Jesus is commending dishonesty in business dealings. Did you hear me? I'm going to say it again.

The fact that this manager was praised does not mean that Jesus is commending us to be dishonest in our business dealings. That's not what he's being prayed for.

We'll see that as we look further. There's a specific thing for which he is praised. And Jesus, thankfully, he didn't just tell the parable and then go. He gives us an interpretation.

He explains it, the meaning of the parable and what he means to reveal in it. So, let's look in verse 1 to 8 where the parable is told. The main thrust that we're meant to catch in this parable is that it is good and praiseworthy to act in the present in light of the future.

Look there in verse 1 to 8. There's a rich man and he hears a report that his manager is steward.

[3:46] This is probably someone who had executive managerial responsibility. He was the one in charge to manage and to oversee all of the rich man's holdings in this area.

But the word came to the rich man that this man is wasting your possessions. We're not told how he did this, but the rich man decided to fire the manager.

And he tells him, you can no longer work for me. Turn in the account of your management. Now, this is likely, what he meant by that is turn in all the records of the business that you've been doing in keeping my manager.

Turn in the books. All the contacts and the information. Turn it in and go your merry way. Now, it probably doesn't happen today because today we have, you know, computers.

And all the data is stored in there. And when you're fired, somebody just walks you right out of the building. It's really if it's in the case like this. But here, they didn't have such computers.

[4:51] They didn't have a place where all the data is stored. This manager would have had all the data and all the information, all the books of this business. So, although he was fired, he would have had to, like, at least, you know, report all the things that he has and hand it over before he can go his way.

So, presumably, before he was given the final boot, he would have had to explain his bookkeeping to somebody else that would be replacing him. So, within this very short time of his firing in and having to bring his boss the accounts of the books, he starts to ponder his situation.

He thinks to himself, this is it. I'm out of a plum job. He said to himself, he doesn't hide the reality of his present state from himself.

He sees it squarely. And he said, and he made a, he's not a dishonest manager, but he made an honest assessment of his current situation. He says, I can't do manual labor, and I don't want to beg.

So, this is what I'll do. I'll get some people to hold me favors. So that when I'm out on the street, I can call on them to return the favor.

[6:13] They hold me. That's what he's doing here. And so, that's what, that's what is meant by verse 4 there. I have decided what to do. Look there in verse 4. I've decided what to do so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.

And how is he going to do that? He calls the first client, who holds his master, a hundred measure of oil. And reduces the amount to 50.

By the way, the word measure there is the English translation for a sort of an Hebrew way of measuring oil. The word there is vatos. And that will have meant a hundred measures of oil will have been about 875 gallons of oil.

This is not a small amount that is owed to his master. And he cuts the debt by 50% for this client. What do you think the client will have felt?

This is great. Thank you so much. I owe you. And then he calls the second client, and he says, how much do you owe my master? The word there for measure of wheat is core.

[7:22] And that will have been about, a hundred bushels of wheat would have been about a thousand, a hundred, what does it say there? A hundred measures of wheat would have been about a thousand, more than a thousand bushels of wheat.

And he cuts his debt by 20%. He effectively refinanced their debt advantageously for them.

Cancelling large sums, large sums of what they owe his master. Now, by the way, about a hundred thousand bushels of wheat would have required a farmland that is about 20 to 25 times the amount of a normal family land.

So this is vast holdings. This is a field of, you know, acres of olive groves that would have produced that amount of oil.

So this is a man who is managing a lot of wealth. And he forgives this great vast amount. That's not his to forgive. That's not his that he didn't own.

[8:33] But here's the surprising thing after he does this. Look there in verse 8. This is what's most surprising about this parable. Now, when the master got wind of this scheme, he praised the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.

That is, his cleverness. Here is a man who has already been shown to be dishonest. He's been caught and fired for it. Then he shows that he's even more dishonest by further cheating his master. And the master responded at the end by saying how clever he is. It's as if the master says to him, you've got one over on me, you sly fox.

And it seems as if Jesus, in telling this parable, holds this up as an example of what we should be like. But that's not really what Jesus is doing here.

So I think it's, and that's why this parable is confusing and difficult. But let's look closely into what Jesus is saying in this parable. Now, it wouldn't be able for us to speculate where and how he is dishonest.

[9:44] We're not told what he did to be dishonest. Or how he is able to reduce the debts of those who hold his master. We're not told that either. Because that's not the point that we're meant to find out here.

And that will eventually probably lead us down the rabbit trail. But the information that is offered to us is that he's being praised. We do know clearly that the manager is not commended for his dishonesty.

Look there. I'm going to repeat it again. The manager is not commended for his dishonesty. How do we know this? Well, because he's being fired for it. Right? He's being let go because of his dishonesty.

So that can be why the master is praising him. So that could not be what Jesus is commending as well in this parable.

But look there again in verse 8. The master commended the dishonest manager for what? For his shrewdness. His cleverness. So this isn't sort of, we don't read this parable and say, well, it's okay for me to be dishonest in my business dealings.

[10:59] To embezzle money. To default on my taxes. This isn't, you know, an excuse for you to do any of those things. Don't go away today doing that.

Or thinking that that gives you, you know, a warrant to do that. That's not what's going on in this parable. But what's commendable about him? About this man? He was clever. He was clever in that he acted in the present light.

In the present. He acted in the present. In light of the future. He acted in the present. He knew that his days are numbered. He acted to shore up his future.

In light of his present circumstances. He acted to secure his future. It's that cleverness that is being commended to us.

So how then do we apply this to ourselves? First, we should read this parable considering the previous passages in context.

[12:02] Luke 13, 14, and 15. Chapter 13 of Luke has been, Jesus has been answering the question, Will those who are saved be few or be many?

And Jesus answers by telling the questioner to strive to enter through the narrow gate. Remember that, Luke 13. He warns them that those who expect to get in will be shut out.

And many from the nations who are not expected to be in the kingdom will be given entrance. And then Jesus goes on in chapter 14 and 15 and talks of the great banquet feast.

We have pictures of feast in those two chapters. And those who are invited in are those who will partake in God's kingdom. Those who are the people who are invited to the feast. But those who are excluded, they might think they have a seat at the table, but they will be excluded.

They will not gain entrance into God's kingdom. So we see in chapter 15 last week the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. And that culminates in the parable of the lost son in the end of chapter 15.

[13:13] And we've skipped that. But actually there's a sermon about that parable. If you want to listen to that, you can go online and look at our sermon archives. And you'll be able to see, I think this past winter we had a sermon about that.

Through all these parables and these teachings from chapter 13 all the way to chapter 16, Jesus has been disclosing and teaching about those who will enter his kingdom.

Those who will have a seat at his kingdom. That's the thrust of this whole section of Luke. So we have to keep that in mind even as we read this and apply it to ourselves.

The application then is this. We are to use our money. Not just our money actually, but our material earthly possessions. We are to use them in the present, in light of the future.

Jesus begins to explain the parable to them in verse 8. This man, this dishonest man, as dishonest as he is, faces a crisis. And he looks beyond the present to secure his future.

[14:29] Jesus then says to us that we should be shrewd sons and daughters of light. Just as the children of this age of darkness are shrewd in their own dealings.

Look there in verse 8. He says, for the sons of this world, the world that world means the sons of this age, the sons of this aeon, are more shrewd, they're more clever in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

So the command, the charge for us is that we should be shrewd and clever in our dealings. We're not told to be shrewd in the way the people of the world are shrewd.

We're encouraged to be shrewd in the way that the children of light are meant to be shrewd. Note that Jesus does not categorize his followers as children of this present age.

He's talking to his followers and he says to them, you've been transformed and translated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You are children of the age to come.

[15:34] You're no longer children of this age, of this world that is passing away, that is going to be destroyed. That means then that even as we live in this present world, we are not of this world.

The priorities and values of this world is not to be our own. Our hope and future is in the age to come.

We wait expectantly for that age to come. And while we wait, we invest our time, we invest our talents, we invest our money to acquire the imperishable riches of the coming age.

That is the point that Jesus is trying to drive on to his disciples here. We do not stir up wealth in this age that is fading away.

Why? Because it is passing away. Jesus says it elsewhere in Matthew 16. Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

[16 : 43] But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not, cannot break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart is also. Where your treasure is, there your heart is also. So how do we do that? How do we lay up treasures in heaven? Listen, Jesus tells us three ways that we do that in verse 19 to 13. The first is that we are to be generous with money.

We are to make friends and influence people with our material possessions. We will flesh that out a bit more.

But the second thing is that we are to be faithful with our money. Faithfulness is required. And Jesus says, as he says that in verse 10 to 12, it's the little thing that counts when it comes to faithfulness.

[17 : 44] And then the last thing that Jesus is telling us about how we do this is that we are not to try to serve money. Rather, we are to serve God with our money.

You see the distinction there? So let's look at the first one. We are to be generous. Jesus says in verse 9, I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth.

The Greek word for welfare is mammon. We know that word. We might have heard that before. Mammon is a Semitic word for money or material possessions. So make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous wealth, unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails, they may receive you into eternal dwellings.

Who are receiving you? Eternal dwellings is God's kingdom, right? That's the same scope of who gets to enter into the kingdom of God. The friends may receive you. Now what does unrighteous wealth mean here in verse 9?

The phrase is used twice, actually. It's used in verse 9 and it's also used in verse 11. Jesus uses it here to describe money. All money. Not just, you know, the mob boss money.

[19 : 00] It's referring to every kind of money Jesus characterized as unrighteous wealth. It's the same word that's actually used to describe the dishonest manager in verse 8.

He's an unrighteous manager, unrighteous man. But is Jesus saying here that money is bad? That we should all right away do away with money? Give all our money away?

Go back to the days of bartering? Is that what Jesus is saying? No, that's not at all. Clearly not.

That's not what Jesus is saying. So what does Jesus then mean by unrighteous wealth? We have to think about what makes money and all material possessions.

What makes them unrighteous ultimately? Is it not because they will perish with this age that is passing away? You're not going to take your money with you to God's kingdom.

You know that there's people of pagan religions, Egyptians and Vikings and all religions of antiquity. They do these rituals of burying treasures with their dead.

[20 : 13] What happens? Years, 50 years, 100 years later, with all these tombs, a thief gets in. He says, well, I take the jackpot and takes the money. The person who's buried there is decayed and his skeletons and his soul is gone to whether heaven or hell.

And the wealth is there for someone else to take. You cannot take your money, your material possessions with you. This is why they're unrighteous.

The meaning of the word unrighteous wealth is that money, we're not going to use, there's no currency in heaven. There will be no banks. There will be no financial institutions.

Sorry if you're a banker. You'll be out of a job when we get to heaven. But many of us will be out of jobs when we get to heaven. So don't worry about it. There will be no doctors either. But this is what Jesus means then.

What then are we to do with this money that is going to perish with this dying age? How are we to use it as children of light? How are we to make friends?

[21:31] We're to use this money in this present age to make friends for the age to come. We are to spend our material possessions generously.

Now, when I say that, I don't want you to hear me and say, well, Jesus is saying that we ought to be communists and just share all our wealth. You know, next Sunday, let's all bring our bank statement and just share the same.

That's not what Jesus is saying here. Right? Jesus believes in private possession of property. Jesus never in the Bible is there Jesus or the apostles commanding people to give their, by force, to give their own wealth away.

That's not what Jesus is saying. He's not advocating that we be communists, give all our money away. He's not even saying that we should beggar ourselves. Right? That's not what Jesus is saying either. Right? Nevertheless, nevertheless, Jesus is saying that we should be radically generous with our earthly possessions.

Specifically by using it to secure friends for ourselves in the age to come. While the children of this age make friends through means of patronage.

[22:56] I do for you, you do for me. And how does that often work? You do for me. I only do for you if I know you can do for me. Right? That's what Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for in the previous chapters.

You only show kindness. You only show hospitality to those who can pay you back. That's not what Jesus is commending here. That is the way of the children of this age.

For we who are in Christ, We are to use our possessions generously, lovingly, for those who cannot even pay us back.

We are to use it to secure friends for ourselves in heaven. So your donation to the church of Christ, Your donation to the mission field, Is to further the work of the gospel.

Now, note, it will not gain you entrance into heaven. That's not what Jesus is saying. He's not saying, buy your way into heaven. This is not that.

[24:03] Remember that Jesus is the narrow door. It's only through Him, in repentance and faith, That we enter in. But this might maybe, This example might maybe help us to understand what Jesus means By making friends for ourselves in heaven.

Imagine this. When you're there, In heaven, Having been saved by Christ's sacrificial, Atoning death for you. Maybe at the moment of your death, You're now with Christ.

Or when you're with Christ's coming, The second coming, We're united with Him. Imagine this then.

A woman from Ethiopia, Or maybe England, Comes to you and says to you, Hello, friend.

And you're sitting like, I don't know that I know you. And the woman tells you, Well, the gospel of salvation came to me Through the missionaries you supported.

That's what Jesus means. Those are the friends you make. You sold your money, Your material possessions, In this present world, For friends in the world to come.

[25:14] Or maybe it's a boy that comes to you and says, Hello, friend. Because of your generosity to those who are working to save the lives of the unborn, My mother was helped.

She did not end my life. She did not ruin hers. Instead, she saw Christ followers, Who displayed the love of Christ to her, Who helped her in a moment of need.

And through that, she came to know Jesus, To know the love of Christ. And she raised me in the faith. And I came to know Jesus. Those are the friends that Jesus is talking about here.

That's the investment that Jesus is calling us to invest in. There are many friends, Through your generosity, That you do not know.

You will know them. In the kingdom of heaven. So are we the kind of church who sees one another's needs? Now, these friends are friends from a distance.

[26:19] There are some friends that are neighbors, close at home. So are we the kind of church who sees one another's needs? I'm proud to say this as your pastor, That I've seen that to be true here at Holy Trinity.

But let's not stop there. Jesus is calling us, To redouble our investment in advancing the kingdom of God. Both here in the city of Syracuse, And to the ends of the earth.

All your investment, In the stock market, In real estate, In anything else in this world, Will ultimately fail.

Even if you're Warren Buffett, The greatest investor of all time. As good as an investor as he is, At the end, He will fail. Why do I say that?

Because, look there in verse 9. It says, When it fails, What is the it that will fail? It's that the world, This passing age, Will one day come to ruin, And destruction, And all the material possessions with it, Will come to an end.

[27 : 39] But when that happens, You've invested, In the bank of heaven, Where there's no moth, Or decay, Or rust, Or thieves, That can strip, Your gains.

There's no recession, That can touch it. Note that Jesus is not, I want you to know here, Because I think it's easy for us to hear this, The wealth, When we talk about wealth, You might say to yourself, Well, I don't have any.

He's talking to those rich folks, Here, Obviously, Not me. I'm just making, I'm trying to make ends meet. Trying to put, Living paycheck to paycheck. But Jesus doesn't make that distinction here, At all.

Note that he's not talking to the rich Pharisees, When he starts this parable, Verse 1, He is talking to his disciples, And many of his disciples were, Just as poor as he was.

They'd left everything to follow him. They were the destitutes, And the poor, And not all of them, Some of them were rich as well, Like Lazarus and Johanna. But Jesus is not, Making a distinction, Based on your socioeconomic, Status, Based on how much money, You have in your bank account.

[29 : 03] Jesus is talking to all of us here. All of us. And we all, No matter how rich, Or poor we think we are, We all have material possessions.

You are probably the richest, 5% In this room, Of the world population. But this generosity, That Jesus calls us to, Also requires faithfulness.

Look there in verse 10 to 12, Be faithful with money. It's the little things that count, Jesus is telling us. 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, You will be faithful in the unrighteous wealth. Remember again, The unrighteous wealth is just, This money that was, Material possessions, That is passing away.

If you then, Will be faithful, In the unrighteous wealth. If you have not been faithful, Rather, In verse 11, In the unrighteous wealth, We will entrust you, With the true riches.

[30 : 09] And if you have not been faithful, In that which is another's, We will give you, That which is your own. But I think the very little, Of verse 10 there, Is not referring to the size, Of your bank account, But the nature of it.

Are you preoccupied, With the size of your wealth, In this world? Are you trying to hoard money? Are you trying to look, In that Old Testament reading, Amos?

Are you one of those people, Who deal unscrupulously, To oppress the poor, So that you can, Advance yourself, Exploit other, Image bearers? That's, Unfaithfulness, According to Jesus, With, Your material possessions.

That's what, Unfaithfulness looks like. And it's not, It's not just, Faithfulness and ten dollars, It doesn't matter. All of it is little, Before, In Jesus' perspective.

All these material possessions, Are little. They are of no consequence, In light of eternity. So if you're, If you're, Faith, If you're faithless, In this little, Which is, Material things, That will pass away, How do you expect, To be entrusted, With true riches, True things, That is imperishable, Eternal riches of heaven, I do expect, To be entrusted, With that.

[31 : 37] Jesus' final instruction, And explanation, Comes in verse 13. He says to us, Finally, Do not try to serve money. Do not try to serve money. Rather, Serve God with your money.

He says that, No servant can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, And love the other, Or will be devoted to the one, And despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

There's no if and but about that. Jesus was emphatic. You cannot serve both. There's one of the things we've got to see here, When we see this. You can't now say to yourself, Well, That means I can try to do 50-50.

I can serve God, And I can serve money. That's, Jesus is quite clear. You cannot serve both. You either serve one, Or the other. So how is your wealth used, In the service of God?

Now when I say wealth, Again, Let me remind you, I'm not talking about the fact that you're, You know, A millionaire. All of us have wealth. We have material possessions. How are you using that which is yours? Your money, Your talent, Your time, Your investment, In the service of God.

[32:47] Are you using it, In solidarity with, With those who are in need? You cannot serve mammon, And God.

It's not possible. One of the other, Must have primacy in your heart. So, Then there are two things we can do. Wealth, Is either used faithfully, That is, In service of God.

Or our wealth, Our material possessions, Becomes an item. That we worship. And if we worship, Our material possessions, Then we will go to, Any end, To acquire more.

Effect, Exploitation, Hoarding, Wastefulness, And disregard, For those in need. That is, That's what, God exemplifies, Those who worship, Money.

But those who worship God, And use their money, To serve their God, Will use those things, In solidarity, With those who are in need. In service of God, And his kingdom.

[33:59] How are we to respond to this, Holy Trinity? This affects us, In every aspect of our life. That's one of the things, We're seeing here, In these passages of Luke.

What it means to be a disciple, Is not just, To say, I believe in Jesus, And then go out, And live, As if Jesus is now, Lord over your life. Jesus says, In the previous chapters, You must be willing to hate, Your father, Mother, Children, Your family, In order to follow me.

You must be able to, Bear your cross, To follow me. Jesus is saying here, In verse chapter 16, You must be willing to, Sacrifice, Your wealth, Your material possessions, In service of me.

How are we to respond to this? This affects us, In every level, As a church, And individually. It affects us, At our vestry level, At a ministry level, It affects us, Each one of us, In our giving, In the church.

Notice here, I'm not, I've not made any prescriptions, And no one in this church, Will make a prescription. You need to give this amount, To be able to enter, Into God's kingdom. We're not prosperity gospels.

[35:08] I'm not asking you, To sow any seed. That's not the vehicle, To heaven. But Jesus is saying to us, Our generosity, Is a description, And revealer, Of where our heart is.

Where our treasure, Truly lies. Where does your treasure lie? And just, I know, This is not part of our passage, But look, Look here, I'm going to read verse 14.

Jesus is talking to the disciples, But he's saying it, He's talking to them, In the hearing of everybody else. So the Pharisees were there. They heard him. And look at Luke 16, Verse 14.

The Pharisees, Who were lovers of money, Heard all these things. And what did they do? They ridiculed him.

They ridiculed Jesus. Jesus said, This is what it means to enter, Into my kingdom. And they said, What are you talking about? This is foolishness. The world will ridicule you, In your generosity, In your sowing into the kingdom work, In your lavish generosity, In your giving of yourself, And time and effort.

[36:17] Your family might say, Why do you spend so much time there? Why do you invest? Why do you help in those people? The world might say, Well, you know, Why give, When there's no return?

You can say, I am laying out my treasures in heaven. Matthew 6. Where moth and rust, Does not decay. Where thief cannot steal from it.

Where I will see my friends, Those whom God, Through my generosity, Have brought into his kingdom. There is no great investment.

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you, Lord, For this difficult word That you have for us this morning. And Lord, We admit that, We are often, All of us, I, Myself included, Are often tempted, By the riches, And the wealth, And the adulation of wealth, That this world offers.

[37:28] And often times, We lose our focus. We do not truly live, Cleverly, As children of the light, In light of eternity. Lord, In the power of the Holy Spirit, Remind us, Lord, Open our eyes to see, To see those in need around us, To see where your kingdom work, Needs our resources, To give of ourselves, Generously, Willingly, Freely, To advance in your kingdom.

And will you use us, Lord, Use us mightily, In that effort. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.