

Luke 16:14-18 AM

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[0 : 00] O God, the protector of all that trusts in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us your mercy, that being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through the things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal.

Lord, press eternity in your heart for us into our hearts this morning. Amen. Grab a seat. Good morning. If I don't know you, my name is Ben Roberts. I'm the director of training for Artizo, and so it's Artizo Sunday, so here I am.

And it's great to see you all. And what a privilege it is to look at Luke chapter 16 today, which is all about eternity. So, whether we are alert to it or not, the weight, the reality of eternity is pressing in on us all the time.

It's like air pressure. It's always there, but we don't think about it until we're taking off or swimming. Jesus wakes us up to eternity. That's one of the things he does in his ministry.

He wakes us up to eternity and how it presses upon us, how it bears on us. And with these two parables, the beginning and the end of the chapter, we get two stories that are looking from different vantage points into eternity.

[1 : 28] So, the first parable we looked at last week, it looks from our world towards eternity. And so, it showed how money is something that doesn't last, but it can be made to last through God's action.

It can be used to serve God and people who do last forever. And in that way, it pushes forward into eternity. And the message there is prepare well. Prepare well for what's to come.

The second parable, and that's next week. David's going to talk about that next week to us. And it actually looks from eternity back into our world. And it shows how eternity speaks to us here and now.

And it speaks through God's word. And we're in the middle of those two parables. We're in this tricky little section. I think Zello was just telling me that the heading of this in the ESV is other teaching.

The editors in the Bible were like, ooh. I don't know. But it's really important, actually. It is this little section that ties everything together.

[2 : 30] Ties the whole section of Luke together. And it's because it speaks very clearly to the purpose of the eternal God. Who, by his grace, is pressing eternity into us.

And so, if this introduction felt like an eternity, here are my three points. It's knowing our heart is point number one. Knowing God's measure is point number two.

And knowing God's heart is point number three. Knowing our heart, knowing God's measure, knowing God's heart. So, let's talk about knowing our heart.

So, if you're open, you can look at verse 14 there. And it says, The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.

So, the whole time Jesus is teaching his disciples in the first parable about money, the Pharisees are there, and they're listening in to what Jesus is saying.

[3 : 32] And their response is to ridicule him. Literally, they sneer at him. They scrunch up their nose. They wrinkle their nose at what he's saying, like it's gross. And they want to deny and delegitimize and scorn everything that they've just heard.

Because they hate it. Now, the Pharisees are extremely religiously observant Jews. So, this is the A-team of rules.

That's the Pharisees. And we've seen through Luke, they've been trying to test Jesus, and they've been trying to trap Jesus. But here we get a very clear view of what actually ails them.

What has actually gone wrong in their hearts. And it's that it seems like they love God. It seems like they love his law. But actually, they love money.

It's amazingly blunt. They are lovers of money, Luke observes. If only we could be so honest with ourselves. Jesus has taught his disciples in the parable we just heard to make friends by unrighteous wealth.

[4 : 41] But the Pharisees have made friends with unrighteous wealth. They're lovers of unrighteous wealth. And for them, money is not an instrument. It's the end. It's what they're aiming for.

Jesus has just said, you cannot serve God in money. It's impossible. You'll love the one. You'll hate the other. And so, what's really shocking here about this kind of candid assessment of the Pharisees is that despite them seeming very faithful outwardly, inwardly, they hate God. That's the corollary. That's the corollary. If they're lovers of money, they're haters of God. They don't serve God. They serve money. They've already made the choice that Jesus is warning them about. It's perfectly understandable, I think. Money is very alluring. It promises control and security and legitimacy and leisure.

And sometimes it even provides these things for a little while. The funny thing about money is no matter how much of it we have, we can never kind of fully extract all of the promises.

[5 : 51] We never get a full grip on everything we think it's going to give us. But one thing we can do with money is measure ourselves against other people. And what Jesus is pointing out here is that that's not the measurement that really matters.

So look in verse 15. We'll see what Jesus says about all this. He says, So that word abomination is literally like a stench, an odor.

And so this is a wonderful play on words here. So the Pharisees are wrinkling their nose at Jesus. And Jesus says, God is wrinkling his nose at you because you stink.

You're foul. And the best example I have of this is my dog. So a few weeks ago, our dog Scout was out and she found something just, I don't even know what it was.

It was the nastiest thing. She found something nasty to roll in. And she came in the house and the kids were screaming. Literally, people were throwing open windows. They were running around and gagging.

[7 : 06] And for her, she thought, This is just, look at this wonderful perfume that I found and I brought to you. And we were nauseated. And that's what the Pharisees are like, Jesus is saying here.

Their beliefs and actions, they're coming in like my dog, right? They're so proud of what they found. They think it's great. And Jesus says, It's putrid. It's putrid to God.

Because God knows your heart. Everybody is fooled. By their religious life, except God. God knows. We can fool each other. We can fool ourselves.

We can't fool God. Because God measures with his standard of goodness and truth. He knows us inside and out. He knows our motivations, our wishes, and our judgments. He sees exactly who we are.

Just as Jesus sees exactly who the Pharisees are. Notice how horizontally oriented the Pharisees are. They're into wealth. It's about power and control in this world.

[8 : 05] They laugh at the idea of eternal dwellings. That's ridiculous to them. They're into impressing other people. Justifying themselves before others. They think if everyone else is buying it, it's as good as true.

And they've taken the law, which is God's way to live. They've taken it very seriously. But they're not actually using it as a means to know and love God. They're using it as a means to further their standing, to impress the people around them.

It's very easy to assume that religiosity, by definition, is about eternity. It seems like those things are always connected. But it turns out that the most religious people care only about the present.

Their religious quest is this God-shaped container, and it's filled with a human agenda. And the hypocrisy of it is exactly why it's foul. Because they speak God's words of eternal life, but they have the stench of death.

And all of this is meant to be a severe, severe warning to them and to us. You could think about money as being a very quick diagnostic.

[9 : 13] How we think about money is how we think about eternity. And I think most commonly we try to hedge our bets. And so we hold on to God with one hand, and we hold on to God with the other.

And we say, we've got both. It's going to be fine. But what Jesus is calling us to do is to subjugate it. We have to subjugate money to God, the giver of all things, and the lover of our souls.

What the Pharisees tried to do is exactly that. They tried to hold on to both. And we see how they ended up. God knows our hearts. Eternity measures us.

And it's the only appraisal that matters. And that's our second point, is knowing God's measure. So let's look at verses 17 and 18. It's easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void.

Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. And he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. So these verses keep drilling deeper into this idea that eternity is measuring us.

[10 : 15] If you're looking at your Bible down in your lap, perhaps, you can look at it quickly. The first five books of the Bible are what's called the law in this day. So there's a few hundred pages there.

And Jesus is saying here we could go to one page. We could go to one sentence. We could go to one word. We could go to one dot on one eye. And heaven and earth will fall to dust before that dot loses effect.

And what he wants us to hear is that God's word, his teaching, his speech, is more stable, more secure, and abiding, and consistent than heaven and earth.

So this is a very beautiful and heavy thing to consider. It means that God's word is more trustworthy than any created thing. It outlasts every created thing.

It means that God's word is more authoritative. It calls us to account in a way that no other created thing can. And so when Jesus turns to divorce in this passage, he's using it as the perfect example of this.

[11 : 18] The perfect example to remind the Pharisees of the words abiding authority, which they're ignoring. So we know at this time that the Pharisees had developed extensive commentary on exactly how and when and under what circumstances divorce was allowed.

And some of their commentary is truly horrifying. So there were commentators out there. They were teachers, and they would go through the law, and they would write, here's what the law says, here's what it means, here's how we live it out.

And some of them would say, you know, if your wife burns your meal, you can divorce her. I mean, imagine reading about marriage in Genesis and then ending up there.

God creates man and woman in and out of and for each other. They're distinct. They're complementary, perfect partners. They're in his image. They're supposed to hold fast to one another, become one flesh.

And when Jesus talks about divorce, he always talks about creation. This is how God made us to be in marriage. And what do you think about God's word? If you're going to build a case out of scripture that allows divorce on a whim, clearly you don't see the word of God as your measure.

[12 : 32] You don't actually see God as your authority. You're taking the word, and you're using it as a tool to pursue your own ends. You're treating God with scorn. They haven't just erased a dot in the law here.

They've rewritten it, basically, in the way that they're playing it out. And the deeper we are in sin, the more likely we are to do things like this. The mental gymnastics of guilt, I think, are the best in the world.

We're so good at this. We're so good at coming up with an argument about why it's different for us or why it doesn't really mean that. And the deeper we are in sin, the more we do it.

Now, it's important to say this is not—this one little verse, it's so terse. It really takes us by surprise. This is not Jesus' or the New Testament's entire teaching on divorce. We know from Matthew that Jesus speaks at greater length on this.

He adds that infidelity, for example, can be grounds for divorce. So why is it so terse here? Why is it so terse equating divorce with adultery in this saying?

[13 : 37] And I think the simplest way to put it is that God knows their hearts, just as Jesus does when he speaks here. So you could say it like this. If someone divorces and remarries another

person because they're just lusting after that person, it's not that different from adultery.

So you can go through all the legal processes to make it a legal divorce, and you could follow all of the Pharisees' careful check marks. But if your heart is just like, I want to be with another person, Jesus says it's adultery.

And God knows our hearts. He knows that the appearance of law-keeping isn't the truth of law-keeping. Just because we can justify it or put legal boxes around it, it doesn't mean that it passes for God.

So again, this is a warning. It's a warning about God's eternal measure and that his words don't fail. He knows our hearts. Is everybody okay?

It's heavy, isn't it? So this is the gospel, isn't it? It presses us in an uncomfortable way before it opens up into life. And that's what the third point is about.

[14:46] It's about knowing God's heart. Do we know God's heart? Do you know God's heart? I don't mean God's expectations, his standard of righteousness, which only gets more stringent in Jesus.

I mean his heart, and by that I mean his desire, his will, what he wants to pass. We've got a room full of people here. Can we be as honest as Dr. Luke was in his diagnosis of the Pharisees?

Don't we love money a little bit? Don't we wiggle away when God's measure gets a little bit too close? Don't we feel uncomfortable? We squirm when we hear these things.

I squirm when I think about God's knowledge of me, God's full knowledge of me inside and out.

That is a difficult thing to imagine, isn't it? And that's the measure of eternity.

It's serious and it's real. But it's paired with the heart of eternity. And that's what verse 16 is about.

It's about the heart of eternity. So look at verse 16. It says, The law and the prophets were until John.

[15:55] Since then, the good news of the kingdom is preached. And, look down at the footnote, everyone is forcefully urged into it.

And this word right here, forcefully urged or pressed in, is the key to both God's heart and it's the crux of this chapter and maybe the whole section.

And so you can see it's pretty important how we translate it. You could translate it two ways. It's either I'm pressing my way into God's kingdom, I press myself in, or it's I'm being pressed into God's kingdom.

And both are technically possible. But what Jesus is saying is very much the second, that the gospel of the kingdom is pushing you, urging you, pushing everyone into eternity.

And that is God's heart. It's simply that he wants us to come in. He wants the foul Pharisees to come in. He wants the hardened sinners.

[16:52] He invites all of them in, all of us in. And you remember what Will just talked about, Luke chapter 14, the great banquet. And the first round of guests, they refuse the invitation with lame excuses.

And so he sends out another set of invitations to the streets and the lanes and the poor and the crippled. There's still room. There's still room. Come in. The final round of invitations goes out. Go out to the highways and the hedges. And do you remember this? Compel them. Compel them to come in. Compel them. Press them. Urge them.

Nobody is forced. Everybody is urged. Everybody is pressed. Come in now. Come in now. The meal's starting. I want you there. I want you. God is a most insistent host.

He'll meet you at the door. He'll walk you in. He'll put his arm around you. He'll take your coat. He'll pull out your chair. He's going to have a drink in your hand. We've all met hosts like this, right? It's almost uncomfortable.

[17:54] It is uncomfortable the way that God presses us. We always talk about serving God, and that's right. But first of all, God serves us. He demands to serve us. This is the heart of God for everybody.

That's who's invited. Did you see that there? Everybody. So it means it's the heart of God for you. And all of Jesus' parables through this section have been showing us this, that the grace of God is pressing everybody to enter.

He's pressing you. And this explains a lot, doesn't it? It explains why Jesus is warning the Pharisees here. It explains why he eats meals with them, even though they're clearly trying to trap him.

It's why he eats with sinners, even when it's socially repugnant. He won't be dissuaded. He's going to press an invitation into every hand. No matter who you are or where you've been, Jesus wants to press the invitation into your hand.

And the urgency of accepting the invitation is so strong because the consequences of refusal are so disastrous. It's because without him, our case is hopeless.

[19 : 00] And the moment that we see it, the moment that it's placed into our hand, is the moment that we're to act on it. So if you were to find yourself sailing in a stormy sea, the same rocks that can sink your boat can save you from drowning, right?

And there's this really paradoxical thing happening where we're very uncomfortably pressed by God knowing us and God seeing our sin. And it's the thing that can destroy us.

We can push against it and reject him. And it's also the same moment that we can fall on his grace and be pushed into the kingdom. And that's what's happening with the pressing. Jesus' ministry, his proclamation of the gospel, is like a storm that's breaking on our lives.

Maybe you felt this in this section. I know I felt this. Like we're pinned down. There's no place to run. There's no place to hide. Jesus has got us by his word, right? He's driving us towards these rocks. And they're either going to save us or they're going to break us. It's comforting and challenging. And if we feel the pressing, we feel the pressure through these passages, it's the grace of God.

[20 : 10] That's what the pressure is. It's grace. Even if it calls us to repentance, it's grace. It's saying now is the moment to turn from your sin and turn to Christ. I think perhaps the most shocking part of this is that this storm, this kind of crisis that we're in, it comes upon us through words.

It's just words. Right? It's just words. Why do they have us in a knot like this? Right? It seems like miracles and signs would be more effective for convincing us that it's actually God's word.

But this entire word of God, not one dot of which fails us, from the law to the prophets, all the way from page one of the Bible to John the Baptist preaching, right into what we're hearing now, the teaching of Jesus, these parables and words of Jesus.

All of it, God's word, is this conduit of eternity. It's God speaking to us now and bringing his grace to bear upon us right now. So we've got this word sitting right here in our hands, and it's God bringing this crisis upon us, saying, you have to accept.

You have to come in now. All of God's speech to humanity, from the beginning to the end, Jesus says here, has the same trajectory and purpose.

[21 : 30] It's all gospel-shaped. It started with the law and prophets. It comes to Jesus. All of it is pressing us into Jesus' kingdom. It's the fulfillment. It's the climax of all it.

It's to feast in God's eternal, joyful banquet. So if you are mulling it over, consider these words to be your invitation.

We can choose to dissect it or deny it, keep it outside, do the mental gymnastics. We can do that. But why not, instead, let it push us into the kingdom?

And if you've never despaired of your own sin and let Jesus push you in, why not now? Why not today? The message of this passage is it should be today.

You should do it today. You should trust Jesus today. Jesus is pressing the invitation into your hand. He says, why not say yes? And if you're already a Christian, you get to say yes again.

[22 : 36] And he bids us to come to him through the narrow door, to be gathered under his wings, to be found by him, the persistent shepherd, to be embraced by the prodigal father. This is what it means to know God's heart.

To be pressed in by his grace. Amen.