

The Unjust Steward

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 October 2009

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again to Luke chapter 16, and we're continuing our studies in Luke, the gospel of Luke, and just again, by way of overview, these verses that we saw, the first 16 verses, 17 verses of this chapter, there was a rich man who had a manager and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions, and so on.

There's no doubt that this is one of the hardest parables, and it's recognized to be one of the hardest parables to understand. And I think we must always remember with regard to parables that we aren't to go through every single bit of the parable and try and work out what everything means, because sometimes we can get ourselves into all kinds of tangles and all kinds of bother with it.

We've got to see sometimes just the main things that the Lord is talking about. And right through this chapter, including the rich man and Lazarus, and I want to look at that this evening, the death of two very different people, the lives and the death of two very different people. The theme that runs right through this chapter is really the right and the wrong use of wealth. And whether that wealth is monetary or whether it is spiritual, it is the right and the wrong use of wealth. And Jesus shows us that our use of money here, our treatment of money, even has a bearing on the spiritual. Often we don't think that. We associate and think, well, this is the money, that's something different. But it's very clear from this that everything is intertwined. Life, we're always trying to compartmentalize life and say, well, here's this bit here, and this is this bit here. And some people will say, well, my religious bit is Sunday morning, and I'll go to church and that's it. And it's like you put on cloaks for different occasions. Well, it shouldn't be like that. The spiritual ought to govern life so that in all the different situations of life, that there is an awareness, that there should be a sense of God in everything.

This sense of God's provision and dependence upon God in all things. And if we live like that, we're living by faith, where we're seeing God in all the things, in the good things, in the bad things, in the everyday things, wherever we are. And it'll make such a difference to our lives. We ought not to be saying, well, this is a Christian part of my life, and then this is the other part of my life.

Lord doesn't want us to live like that. That's not how it is. Everything is interlinked and intertwined. Now, this story at one level is a very straightforward story. It's a wealthy man, and he is a manager. And it would appear that the manager is not a very good manager. He's not doing things very well. And that the business isn't going very well because he's not managing it aright. Some people think there's an element of dishonesty because it's a parable of the dishonest manager. But whatever he was doing, it tells us he was wasting his possessions. He was wasting the possessions of the owner. The manager was wasting the possessions of the owner. And in other words, this word wasting is the same word that's used to the prodigal who wasted his substance, wasted all that he had. So this is what we find here, that this manager was a bad manager. He wasn't handling things very well. But I suppose before we go any further, we've got to ask ourselves this question. Here is this manager. He was steward of what his owner had given him to manage. The question must be asked.

[4 : 25] Jesus uses the parables always to bring things to ourselves. And we were to ask the same question. Are we using what God has given us in a right way? The abilities, the talents, the time, the resources, the energy, the money, all the different things that God has put into our care. Because we are, as it were, managers, we are stewards of what God has given us. One day God is going to require of us.

And he's going to say to us, what did you do? What did you do with all that I gave you? Did you use it on yourself? Or did you use it for me? Now, of course, we have to use things in ourselves. It's not a sin we've got to provide. That's not the issue. When we will come tonight to see the rich man and Lazarus, that was the problem with the rich man. He had no eye for God. He had no eye for those in need. All he could think of was himself. It's me. A me-centered life.

And if we live like that, we will experience God's judgment. It's as clear in scripture as anything. The reverse is that we are to use what God has given us for his service and for his glory.

Not according to how we feel. You know, we live in such a selfish society. People say, I'm not going to do that. It's going to put me out. The Lord. If we're talking about putting out, who was put out more than Jesus? Jesus left the realms of glory. He came down into this sin-sick world, took to himself a human nature. He suffered in a way and a manner that nobody suffered.

He endured the most awful, horrendous death imaginable at a physical level. But as for the spiritual torment that he endured where he experienced the wrath and curse of God, experienced what constitutes hell, he did that for us. And how can we ever say, oh, it puts me out a little.

[6 : 56] I cannot do this. I cannot. We have to face up to this. Do we say, are we willing to put ourselves out for the Lord or not? Because the Lord is going to require this of us one day. And he's going to ask, what did you do for me? When we go through the teachings of Jesus, in his plain explicit teachings, and also in his stories and parables, it is abundantly clear that at the end of the day, there is to be a judgment made upon what we have done for him by faith. And when a person dies, remember this, it tells us about the work of the believer. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.

Remember that, blessing. It may seem a tragedy, it may seem, and it is to families. But for the one who dies, it's blessing, it's happiness, it's joy. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, and their works do follow them.

Isn't that wonderful? The works don't stop here. The fruit of them, the reward of them, that is eternal. It must be an awful thing to go and be bankrupt, where you say, I didn't do anything.

All the resources that you gave me, Lord, I just used them upon myself. You go to Matthew chapter 25, and you'll find a story about that. One man got ten talents, another got five, and one got one. The one who got one, what did he do? He buried it in his tent. His day of reckoning came, and he had nothing to show for what he was given. We don't need to stretch the mind in any way to work out the application of what has been said there. To the one who has done much, more is given. That's the way the Lord works.

And so, the teaching of Jesus is hard-hitting, and it deals with, and we've got to face up. There's no point in just looking at these stories and saying, oh, well, oh, well, that's, that's that. That was, he was talking about, these are good. No, the parable, as we said before, was to hit us. They were to be like mirrors in our lives, to say, right, where am I in relation to all these things? So, here is this man, in a way, this manager, and he has wasted the resources that his boss had. The manager was hauled before his boss, and the manager knew the writing was on the wall, because he knew he was going to be fired. And he thought to himself, what am I going to do? He obviously, he was either an older man, or he wasn't a very strong man, because he said, I'm too, I'm not strong enough for laboring. I can't live a laborer's life.

[10 : 01] And after the kind of lifestyle I've lived, I can't go on to begging. I'm too ashamed to go from being a manager to just begging. They didn't have the kind of structure that our society has where permission is made when a person becomes unemployed. In those days, if you became unemployed or lost your job, that was it. You were dependent upon others. So, this man, he's a shrewd operator, and he decides, there's only one thing that I can do. My master has loads of people who owe him stuff.

I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to create a community of goodwill towards me, so that when I get fired, which I'm just going to get fired, those people who I have created this goodwill with, they're going to take pity upon me. That's what he does. Now, some people were saying, this man is just ruthless. Well, if we're going to be kind to him in any way, I would say that possibly, as a manager, he would get commission on whatever was sold, so that maybe, if we're being kind to him, maybe some of what he was dealing with here would actually be commissioned to himself, but it obviously was more. So, he did something very simple. He went to all the people who owed his boss, and he said, look, he would come to their home, and he said, right, what is it you're owing my boss? And we find here, for instance, we find, say, in verse 6, how much, verse 5, how much do you owe my master? The man said, a hundred measures of oil. So, that's, we see down at the bottom, that's 875 gallons of oil. The man said, okay, see your bill? I'm going to change it. I'm going to give you a new bill. Instead of that, a hundred, that 875 gallons will make it sort of 400 and 435, we'll half it. And the person would say, really? Yeah, we'll half it. Oh, that's one. I can repay.

I was struggling. I couldn't repay the other. Oh, thank you so much. And then he went to the other person. He did exactly the same thing. What's the bill? Right, let's half it. And he'd write out a new bill. And so, you see, straight away, he was creating this great, this goodwill towards himself, so that everywhere there was this man and that person, that person would say, oh, I see that manager.

He saved my life. I was in so much bother and trouble. I couldn't repay. Now I can. And they would be saying, what a good fellow he is. And in fact, the owner, he had to acknowledge just how wise or how shrewd this fellow was. So Jesus begins to make applications from this. Now, one of the things that Jesus tells us from this is that the world will often show more wisdom, more industry, more energy, displaying the use of resources to a far greater way in a far, they are almost an example to the Christian. Now, Jesus is not teaching here that we are to be dishonest. He's not teaching anything like that, but he's showing how people will, when they're put into accord, he's showing the industry, the resources, showing how people will work away in the world.

Often far more so than the believer. And we, do we not see that played out so often? Where people in the world give their life, their energy, their time. You see, you see it in all the different walks of life, in politics, in finance, in economics, in sport, the people who live their lives, devote their lives morning, noon, and night with all their energy, all their passion, because they believe in what they're doing. And they're successful in what they're doing. And then you look at the Christian. And you see his life or her life, and it's half-hearted. It's lethargic. It's doing a wee bit here, or doing nothing. And that's part of what the, part of the message that Jesus is showing here.

[14 : 39] Look at the world. Christians, look at the world. Look at their industry. Look at their energy. And here is, here are you. You've got true riches. What are you doing with them? That is one of the things that Jesus is highlighting from this. It would also appear from this that the use of our money and possessions and what we have has a bearing upon the future life. Because in verse 9, Jesus says, 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. Now, again, the word there, unrighteous wealth, some people, and you will actually find some commentators, believe that wealth is unrighteous.

That is, I do not believe that for one moment. I believe that wealth, possessions, money is neutral. And that a person can do, can make these things either really worthwhile, or they can bring so much trouble. They are not in and of themselves unrighteous as such, because these things can be put to tremendous righteous use. Unrighteous wealth, I believe it means, A, acquiring wealth by unrighteous means, by dishonesty, by doing someone. If you were to do somebody at somebody else's expense, you make money at his expense, in a dishonest manner. That would be unrighteous wealth, because you'd say that, actually, this money, I've gained it in a dishonest manner. That would be unrighteous wealth.

Again, wealth can be used in unrighteous ways. That was highlighted in the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man used his wealth purely and simply upon himself. There was a beggar at his door, every day, covered in sores, absolutely no food. This man was loaded, and it never even entered into his head to slip him a pound or slip him whatever, a denarii or to give him anything. He was dependent on the crumbs that would fall from his table that the dogs would have. He doesn't even tell us that he ever got these crumbs, just hoping that he would get them. There's loads of ways it could be unrighteous wealth, using wealth in an unrighteous way, but the rich man certainly was one who used it in that way.

And again, wealth possessions, such like, can be unrighteous in the sense that we can have a wrong estimate or a wrong assessment of people because of wealth. Wealth has an incredible way of turning people's heads, of turning people's judgment and assessment of people. Wealth can distort things.

But I think here, there's various ways that can be looked at, but I would like to think that one of the ways that it can say here is, I tell you, make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous wealth so that when it fails, they may receive you into eternal dwellings. One day the wealth is going to fail. One day the money is going to run out. One day there will be no money. And whatever it is, one day we'll leave everything behind. I believe that one of the things that has been spoken about here for the believer is using the resources that we have towards the spread of the gospel.

[18 : 36] It might be, if you have money, is giving some of that money. For instance, to Bible translations, to people who are Bible translators, to using some money towards mission. And we do that in so many ways as a congregation, in a multitude of ways. For instance, in our giving, just for instance, in our giving. One of the things that we do, that's what I'm going to spend time on here. But when we give, for instance, to our congregation here, we are what is termed an aid-giving congregation.

We support quite a number of other ministries through your giving. But we also support work all over the world through your giving. So that this is part of what I believe has been spoken about here. But you will also independently support many things privately. One day, when this world is over, and you're in glory, and I believe there will be complete interaction and fellowship in glory, if there is interaction and fellowship here, how much more there will be interaction and fellowship there? Of course, with alarm in the center of it all. But of course there will be.

We will meet people there in glory. And it may have been a word that we spoke. It might have been a testimony that we gave. It might have been a book that was handed. It might have been a tape that was given. It might have been some money we put into a plate that was used in some foreign land to bring the gospel. And this soul came to faith in Jesus Christ. And you had a little part to play with it along the way. That's what counts. Jesus is saying, at the end of the day, that's what counts.

And so we've got to be sowing, sowing, sowing for this future harvest. And then the Lord goes on to show, the time's moving, that we cannot separate the spiritual from the material. Because Jesus poses a question from verse 10. And he says, if we are faithful in very little, we're also faithful in much. And if you have been faithful, in verse 11, with the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust you with the true riches? So the Lord is actually showing that if we are flippant and careless with what we have in life, the actual natural resources that we are given, we're liable to be the same with the spiritual. And it's quite a sobering thought.

Sometimes we need to stop and say, I never saw it that way. But that's the way that the Lord looks at it. And then he goes on to say that no servant can serve two masters, for either will hate the one and love the other, or else he'll be devoted to the one and despise the other. Can't serve two at the one time. We may think we can, but we can't. Any more than we cannot walk in two directions at the same time, try and see somebody walking two ways at the one time, you'd say to yourself, he's mad.

[22 : 04] And the Lord says, a person who's trying to serve another master at the same time as the Lord is mad. And so here is a challenge to us. Who are we serving? Is it, we're told here, it's money. Is it God or is it money?

Who is your master today? Who has a chief seat in your heart? Now, a word of caution. Don't anybody here begin to think of anybody else. You know, there's always a danger of beginning to think of somebody else. And you say to yourself, oh, I know somebody who's prospering. You know, I think money. I think money is his God or her God. We're not to think like that. We don't know.

Because maybe the person that you think is prospering and has a problem with money and is devoted to money actually is not. That person might be as centered on the Lord. The Lord is making him prosper or making him prosper. Money is not an issue. They're getting on well, but money is not an issue.

God is at the center of that person's life. There could be another person who has very little money. money. And money is that person's God. Because this person is obsessed with getting money.

And is doing everything in his or her power to get money. And it's money is there in their thinking all the time. We are not to make these judgments. The Lord is saying, you look to yourself.

[23 : 47] You make the assessment about yourself in relation to what my word is saying. What motivates us? Who is at the center of our lives? And then we find that Jesus has a word for the Pharisees. Because, you know, when the Pharisees heard this, they ridiculed him. And they ridiculed him because they were lovers of money. And he said to them in verse 15, you are those who justify yourselves before men. But God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John. Since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached. And everyone forces his way into it. The Lord hates to see people justifying themselves. Puffing themselves up. Excusing themselves. The Lord loves to see the honesty of heart. The integrity of heart. The Lord loves to see those who are not glowing in themselves.

And, you know, I wonder where in this celebrity-obsessed society, where so many people do apparently glory. I'm not saying that every celebrity by any means. And again, we mustn't pass judgment.

We can see how many people are obsessed with fame. Obsessed with being famous. Trying to glorify themselves. And the Lord says, no. That's wrong.

And then another warning to the Pharisees. Because the Pharisees were falling into that very trap. They were justified. They were glorying in themselves. And the Lord is saying, the law and the prophets were till John. In other words, the law and the prophets were being preached until John. And then when John came, John heralded in the kingdom. John preached the kingdom. But the law and the prophets were all about the king. And there's a word of warning to the Pharisees. And it is this.

The Pharisees were so blinkered. They were standing still. And the publicans and the sinners were bypassing them. Running past. Forcing their way past into the kingdom. Because the Pharisees and the scribes were puffing themselves up. Gloring in themselves. And the publicans. The outcasts. The nobodies. They were going into. Little Zacchaeus up the tree. He comes running into the kingdom.

[26 : 27] Matthew who's sitting at the seat of custom. He comes running into the kingdom. There are all these people who were outcasts. They're going into the kingdom. And there are these Pharisees who were parading themselves and thinking themselves to be somebody. And they're standing still.

Going nowhere. Where are you going, my friend? Jesus is showing that effort is required to enter the kingdom. We don't get into the kingdom slouching. We don't get into the kingdom just as it were. Drifting about. This is serious work.

Where are you? You alone can answer the question. Only I can answer the question for myself. Only you can answer the question for yourself. Let's think about these things. What is our reaction to all that God has given us? If the Lord were to take you home, to take me, if the Lord was to take us away tonight, how would we fear? How, what answer could we give the Lord?

With regard to all that He's given us in this life, have we used it for Him? Or have we not? It's an all-important question. Let's pray.

Oh, Lord, our God, we pray that we may look to the Lord and that we might be willing, made willing to be used by the Lord. Because at the end of the day, this is what is important.

[28 : 11] This is the question that the Lord is going to ask. What have you done for me? We give thanks, oh Lord, that the Lord sees what is by faith. And we pray that faith may be uppermost in our heart. And that we will seek to serve the Lord with a willing heart, realizing that no work for the Lord, no labor in the Lord is in vain. Give us then the faith to see, the willingness to serve, and help us as we journey along through life to realize that the days are short and that our day will soon be over. We are seeing one after another being called home.

It will soon be our time. We pray then that we may use our time wisely and fill it with work for our Master. Bless us then, we pray, and take away our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

Amen.