Luke 16:1-8

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[0:01] I owe you a confession. Last year, about this time, I was speaking on a Sunday evening, and it was in the 90s, and the fact was overwhelming us, and I was praying that it would not be like that tonight. So if you were planning a day on the beach, and I ruined it by praying that it would be a little cooler, my apologies, but it's nice to have it not quite so hot.

Our passage tonight is a complicated one. It's found in Luke chapter 16, verses 1 through 18, on page 875 in your pew Bibles, and I would encourage you to look it up and follow with me, because over the course of the next half hour or so, we will be referring to the text as we move through it.

We read, He, that is Jesus, 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. 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. 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've decided what to do, so that when I'm 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, A hundred measures of oil. He said to him, Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write fifty.

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 very little is also faithful in much.

[2:37] And one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to 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? 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. The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, 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 who forces his way into it.

But it is 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.

[3:58] And he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. I told you, this is a complicated passage. And before we say anything else, let's bow and ask God's leading.

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Father, we need your help. I need your help. Each one of us who listens needs your help to understand what you want us to take from this passage.

Father, help us to listen to your voice. Father, I don't want folk here to listen to me, but to listen to you.

And pray that you would teach us tonight through your word. Lord, illumine our hearts and allow us to come away from our time this evening understanding what you want for us.

We pray this for our good and for your glory. In the name of our Lord Jesus, amen. We moved from the three stories of Luke chapter 15, which show the great joy we can have when we recover something that has been lost.

[5:15] Luke 15 ends with the emphasis on the loving and forgiving father and the joy he had when his wayward son returned. Now, among other lessons in these parables, I think they teach us to be faithful, to care for what God has given, whether it be a coin, a sheep, or a son.

And I believe that same theme of faithfulness carries on into these stories that we have in our passage for tonight.

Our passage is divided into four parts. First, it's Jesus' parable or story about a shrewd manager, verses 1 through 8.

Second, his comments on it, verses 9 through 13. Third, where God's values and man's values collide, verses 14 through 17.

And finally, one verse on marriage, verses verse 18. Now, tonight in my comments, I'm going to focus on the first two passages.

[6:21] So, when we get fairly far down the hour and you say, well, you've only done two of these, don't be too concerned. The last two we will deal with more briefly.

But let's think about this shrewd manager. Let me read this passage again for you so you have it firmly in mind. He also said to his disciples, 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 your account of your management, for you can no longer be manager. 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've 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, a hundred measures of oil. And he said to him, take your bill, sit down quickly, write fifty.

[7:28] 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. Now, first thing we want to notice is that this parable, this story, is addressed to Jesus' disciples.

A lot of his other parables are addressed to the Pharisees or to the Jewish people, but this was addressed to the disciples. This is what he wanted his followers to hear.

Now, the big question is, what is the point? Is Jesus actually telling us to make sly deals to defraud our employers?

Is that what he wants us to do? I mean, at face value, that's kind of what it sounds like. But I think we need to dig a little deeper than that. We need to start by reviewing one of the basic principles of Bible interpretation, and that is when we're dealing with a parable that Jesus tells, he's making one point.

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He's not asking us to focus on all the details, but rather to focus on the one point that he is wanting to emphasize. One of my heroes of communication is Abraham Lincoln.

[8:50] I mean, I understand that so often when Lincoln was asked a question, he would answer it with a story. And I kind of tried to do that a lot in my medical practice.

And one of the situations which I rather regularly encountered was someone come in with pneumonia. They would be sick. They'd have a high fever.

They would be short of breath. They would be coughing up this yucky stuff. And I'd say, hmm, I think you've got pneumonia. Yeah. And perhaps we should prescribe an antibiotic if it's a bacterial infection, and hopefully that will help.

And then in my practice we would often pray together that the Lord would take the medicine and use it to cause some healing. And he often did.

And the patient would often come back for his follow-up visit the next week. And he said, oh, doc, thank you. I feel so much better. My fever went away in the second day. I'm breathing better.

[9:53] But, you know, I'm still coughing up this really yucky stuff. And don't you think another week of antibiotic would be helpful? And fortunately my patients knew me and my quirks pretty well.

And I could say some pretty crazy things. And they would say, oh, they're done off again. But I would say, well, have you ever been to Gettysburg? And, of course, that would throw them for a loop.

And they'd say, well, yeah, I visited the battlefield a couple years ago. And I said, do you remember the story of Gettysburg? You know, on July 1, 1863, the battle started and it really came to its peak.

On July 2nd and 3rd and by July 4th, the North had won. Lee was retreating and the battle was over.

But there were thousands of dead bodies on that battlefield. And I understand it was not until the week before Lincoln arrived in November to give the Gettysburg Address that they finally had all those bodies buried.

[11:05] Can you imagine what that was like in the summer? My word. Now, honestly, I really wasn't trying to teach my patients about the Civil War.

But what I was trying to do was make the point that after the shooting stops, the battle is won.

You don't have to keep shooting. And we've shot our big guns at the enemy bacteria in your lungs, and they're all lying there dead. And you're coughing up all this yucky stuff, but all you're really doing is cleaning up the battlefield.

So we don't need more antibiotics. The battle is won. The fight is over. Well, they got the point. They got the point. But I was telling that whole story to make one point.

And I think Jesus is telling us this whole story about this shrewd manager to make one point. So what is the story?

[12:08] The steward was wasting. The word is squandering his master's wealth. Now, it's interesting. If you go back to the previous story about the prodigal son, that's exactly the same word that he was squandering his father's money.

So there's a little continuity between these two stories. And the master confronts him and tells him he's soon to lose his job. Now, it's not clear why he didn't say, you have to have your desk packed up in 30 minutes and be out of here.

That's the way companies do it today. But a little bit reminiscent of our heavenly father, who tells us that we are sinners, that we deserve his punishment.

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The master was merciful and gave him some time, presumably, to repent and to turn things around. Did the steward do that?

No. No, he took further advantage of his master. I think that's the point. And started to defraud him so that he could make friends who would take care of him after he lost his job.

[13:30] Now, I have to admit, it's not totally clear just how bad this guy was. Some people would say that the word translated dishonest could also be translated, he did it the way the rest of the world would do it, which admittedly often is dishonest.

But he was staying in line with his culture. And others would say, well, probably the master was charging exorbitant interest, and that was against the Jewish law.

So the steward just simply discounted the interest that the master was charging on the loans that he had. So maybe this guy wasn't as bad as it seems, but I think he probably was, though there's room for a little bit of question about that.

But I think the second question that we have to deal with is, what is this trying to teach us about faithfulness? The manager was not faithful to his master, so it's a negative example.

Jesus later will give us a little more positive spin on it. But then the third question is, what are we supposed to learn? First, we should not learn to put our own interests above those of our employers.

[14:54] But rather, I think the point is, a good manager is one who looks to the future, considers its implications, and then proactively takes steps to assure that things will go well.

And that's precisely what our friend in this story did. He was looking to the future, he was anticipating what was going to come, and thinking about what steps he could make to improve it.

And that, I think, is the point of the story. But now let's go to the second section and see what comments Jesus makes about this parable.

Let me read again chapter 16, verses 8 through 13. 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.

[16:06] One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much. And the one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.

If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to 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?

No servant can serve two masters, for either will he 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.

So what is it that the master commends his manager for? What does he commend him for?

We go to an African-American church where people talk back and forth. Come on. Someone. Shrewdness.

[17:16] Yeah. He's commended for being shrewd. Now, what is shrewdness? Now, oftentimes we think of shrewdness in a very negative context.

You know, the sly dealer who's sneaking around and working under the covers, as it were, and trying to get his own way.

But shrewdness is actually not a negative term. It's a rather neutral term. And here, Jesus uses it in a very positive sense and tells us as his followers that we are to be shrewd.

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We are to use our brains to think through things, to strategize, and come up with a way to get things done. And Jesus challenges his listeners, and for our purposes tonight, that's you and I, to be shrewd.

Jesus says the sons of this world are more shrewd than the sons of light. And that's often true. But we as Jesus followers are to have a gospel kingdom-centered shrewdness.

[18:27] And we're often missing that. We need to be more shrewd in the way we handle our lives. So how do we handle our monies? Are we handling them wisely, or do we squander them?

What about other areas of our lives? Some of us are out of work. Are we being shrewd in the way we're looking for a job? Are we getting the help that's available?

Do we get someone to help us write our resume? Do we counsel with other people? Or do we just kind of sit there waiting for things to happen? Some are homeless. Are we being shrewd in taking advantage of the help that's available to us?

If we're sick, are we being shrewd in using the resources which God allows to us to seek better health? What about the wealthy? Are we being shrewd in the way we handle and invest our money and using it well for the kingdom of God?

Jesus wants us to be shrewd. And that he commended in this man. As a church, we need to be shrewd.

[19:34] At Trinity Baptist, as we go forth with the gospel, do we think carefully about our approach? I know the elders really do a lot of strategizing. Are we looking at the research?

Are we looking at and carefully evaluating the people we're trying to reach, the lives we're trying to reach? Are we being very shrewd in our approach?

We need to be. Because I think being shrewd is part of being faithful. And that's what these passages are all about.

Now, Jesus makes a fascinating comment. And I think it should intrigue us. Let me read verse 9 again. 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, I can't tell you how many times I've read the book of Luke. I mean, I've been a believer for over 60 years. And I'm sure I've read this passage at least once a year in those times.

[20:52] And I don't think I ever paused and said, what is he saying there? But, you know, I think what he's saying is what he's saying. And I think we need to get ahead of a point here.

A couple of things we need to note. First of all, it talks about unrighteous wealth. Does that mean all money is bad?

No, I don't think so. It's not necessarily good. It's not necessarily bad. It is unrighteous because it lacks inherent righteousness in it.

But that doesn't mean it's evil and bad. Secondly, he's saying it's wise to use our money to make goods friends.

In Proverbs, we read, a man's gift makes room for him and brings him before the great. And why is it important that we use our gifts, our monies, to make good friends?

[21:58] And this, to me, is the fascinating and intriguing part. Why is it? Because when we get to heaven, these people are going to be there to welcome us. Now, we don't get a lot of insight through the scriptures as to what heaven will be like.

But to me, there's a couple of things implied in that statement. One, some of the friends we have on earth will still be our friends in heaven. Two, some of the good things that we have done for other people on earth will be remembered when we get to heaven.

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That's what it says. That should motivate us to use some money to make good friends. Because they'll be friends for all eternity.

We don't usually think in those terms. I'm reminded of a song that was popular a number of years ago. I think it was written by Ray Bolts.

I dreamed I went to heaven and you were there with me. We walked upon the streets of gold beside the crystal sea. We heard the angels singing. Then someone called your name.

[23:13] We turned and saw a young man running. And he was smiling as he came. And he said, friend, you may not know me now. But then he said, but wait. And he used to teach my Sunday school when I was only eight.

And every week he would say a prayer before the class would start. And one day when you said that prayer, I asked Jesus in my heart, Thank you for giving to the Lord.

I am a life that was changed. Thank you for giving to the Lord. I'm so glad you gave. Then another man stood before you and said, Remember the time a missionary came to your church and his pictures made you cry?

You didn't have much money, but you gave it anyway. Jesus took the gift you gave and that's why I'm here today. One by one they came, as far as the eye could see.

Each life somehow touched by your generosity. Little things that you had done, sacrifices made, unnoticed on the earth, in heaven now proclaimed.

[24:21] And I know up in heaven you're not supposed to cry. But I'm almost sure there were tears in your eyes. As Jesus took your hand and you stood before the Lord, he said, My child, look around.

Great is your reward. Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am a life that was changed. Thank you for giving to the Lord.

Lord, I'm so glad you gave. People will be welcoming us into heaven. What a thought. Now, in the next verse, verse 10, Jesus speaks to our being faithful in our use of money.

It reminds me of 1 Corinthians 4. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. Just what the guy in our parable wasn't. God is much more interested in how faithful we are in how we handle his things than how many of his things we have.

We tend to emphasize how much wealth we have. He emphasizes our faithfulness. And here he makes three major points. First, what does Jesus say is the opposite of faithfulness?

[25:42] What does he compare faithfulness to? Waste. Not in the passage. If you're not being faithful, you are being dishonest.

Wow. If we're not being faithful, we're being dishonest. One very real sense. If we're not managing the monies God has given to us well, we're stealing from God.

Second point. One reason God entrusts money to us is a test to see if we are capable of handling the much more valuable spiritual resources he could entrust to us.

If you would like to do true spiritual work and have an impact for God's eternal kingdom, start by managing your money well.

Now, what might be those spiritual resources he's talking about here? Let me just give you three examples. Evangelism. If you would like to be more effective in your evangelism, manage your money well.

[26:55] Prayer. If you would like to be more effective in your prayer life, manage your money well. Some do counseling. If you want to be able to counsel people effectively for God and his kingdom, start by managing your money well.

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These are some of the things that he will give us to those who manage well. And third, he reminds us that all too easily money can become a god.

Something we worship. And there is no way we can worship God and money at the same time. It's pretty easy for us to slough it off. It's, ah, I don't worship money.

But we need to look at our hearts. We need to look at our attitudes. We need to look at our actions and ask how much we do. So those are Jesus' response to the parable of the shrewd steward.

We move to section three. Let me read it again. Verses 14 through 17. The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things and they ridiculed him.

[28:04] And he said to them, 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. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void.

In this section, we're reminded to be faithful to God's word. Even though the parable and teaching were addressed to his disciples, there were Pharisees standing around, and now he enters into a dialogue with the Pharisees.

It's interesting that in many of the interactions with the Pharisees, they were accusing him of being too lax in the way he lived.

Eating with publicans and sinners and drinking and all these things they were criticizing him for. But now when it comes to their pocketbooks, they're accusing him of being way too rigid.

[29:15] They didn't want to hear this type of rigid thinking on their finances. And while they were trying to justify their own wealth, Jesus reminds them that God sees right through them.

He understands how much they love their money. And he was accusing them in that sense of not truly loving God. Because remember, he said you can't love God and money.

So if he accuses him of loving their money, he is accusing them of not loving God. Which the Pharisees would not take well.

His knowledge is that a new day has come. He's preaching the kingdom of God. He's proclaiming this new way. But he says that does not invalidate the law.

Now I think in context, we can say he's probably referring to the law of the Old Testament in regards to finance. I don't think he's necessarily referring to all of the law.

[30:22] But the law that has to do with money. And he tells them that they are to be faithful to the word of God in their finances.

Now Jesus doesn't go on to explain things further. So I won't try to either. But then he comes to section four. Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.

And he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. Now here, before leaving the subject of faithfulness, Jesus makes one more point and says we are to be faithful to our marriage vows.

In context of our passage, I think this means that we are to be shrewd in the way we handle our marriages too.

To be faithful, we need to be thinking through the implications of what we're doing. We need to think about what's coming down the line if we're going to be faithful in our marriage.

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[31:30] Excuse me. Here too, he's speaking to the Pharisees and makes the point that their thinking was not the same as God's thinking. In a culture where divorce is common, even among followers of Jesus, sometimes it's done for what I think can be argued as biblical reasons.

Other times, divorce is purely a selfish act. But here Jesus is not specifically talking to divorce, but to the question of remarriage.

And since the context of faithfulness, I believe the issue is how should remarriage be viewed in the context of our original marriage vows.

Now here there are many interpretations, and the literature on this in the Christian world is vast. As different people, I have different views. My personal thought is that when it says woman divorced from her husband, that may well refer to a woman who initiates a divorce for inadequate non-biblical reasons in God's eyes, and she is still married in God's eyes.

And if she marries someone else, she forces him to commit adultery. And I think that's the gist of what is being said there.

[32:51] But I believe that's an extremely complicated question, and I think at Trinity we're happy to defer that to the elders as they counsel with individuals on this very difficult subject.

So we've covered a lot of territory in Luke 16 to this point, from a shrewd manager to Jesus' teaching on being faithful in our finances to our being faithful to the Old Testament law to our being faithful to God's teaching on marriage and remarriage.

The overarching principle is that we must be shrewd and faithful to the Lord in all things. But we don't do it.

I don't do it, and I don't think any of us can say that we are as faithful as we should. But there's still good news, and the good news I can share with you from 2 Timothy, that if we are faithless, he remains faithful.

And if we're not faithful in the way we manage our finances, the way we respond to God's word, and the way we are in our marriages, yet we can be so grateful that God is faithful.

[34:18] Let us pray. Father, Father, we thank you for your faithfulness to us.

It is by your grace, certainly not by what we deserve, for we are so often unfaithful. But Lord, we want to do better. We pray that we would be shrewd in the way we conduct ourselves, take time to think about what things mean, to be careful, to build for the future, to use the brains you've given us, to depend on your spirit, to guide us, so that we make wise choices.

We want to handle our finances well. We want to be faithful to your word. Those of us who are married want to be faithful to our marriage vows. But Father, even when we fail, we thank you that you are faithful and that you will never forsake us.

We give our thanks and ask your help. In our Lord's name, amen. Let's take a moment to celebrate God's faithfulness.

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