

Luke 16:1-13 Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ²So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’ ³“The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg— ⁴I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’ ⁵“So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶“Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. “The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.’ ⁷“Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ “‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. “He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’ ⁸“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. ¹⁰“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹²And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own? ¹³“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

So for his sixteenth birthday, your mother and father give your son \$700 and tell him to spend it on whatever he wants. What are you going to tell your son? Well, go have fun?! I doubt it. You’re going to give some careful instruction, right? “Think before you spend it!” And why? We know that the way he spends that money can certainly help him, but it can also hurt him. And the way he spends the money can also help or hurt others, including the grandparents who gave it to him. If he goes and spends the whole amount on a night of partying, probably not good for your son or his friends, and it would not strengthen his relationship with the grandparents. Think before you spend! That’s not just counsel for a teenager who just got a pile of money, that’s Jesus’ command for all of his followers in the words we read from Jesus’ lips a few minutes ago.

The parable we read is certainly a unique one. The story is about a man that had been accused of mismanaging his boss’s money and he was told he would lose his job, so he lowers the bills of his boss’s customers so that he has connections when he loses his job. His master commends him for being shrewd – clever. So, what’s the point? Is Jesus telling us to be dishonest in order to make friends? No. How do you know? Well, he’s very clear what his point is when he explains the parable. He says, “**Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.**” Jesus is saying, use your money to serve others in a way that impacts their eternal future – or I’ll say it this way, use it in a witnessing way, a way that shows or shares that you follow Jesus. Then he makes the point to be trustworthy with what we have: Verses 10-12: “**Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.** ¹¹ **So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?** ¹² **And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?**

Look, you can’t hide from God either what you have or how you use it. And who gives us what we have? God. But wait a second, didn’t I earn it? Didn’t I work hard for it? Isn’t it mine?!” Well, it is within your power to decide how to use it, but finally, who gave you the skills to do your job? Who allowed for you to be born in this country where, you not only have a job, it also pays what it does? And who can allow all of that money to be used up in months for a major medical situation, injury, or loss of a job? Who can allow for financial conditions to lower the value of all that money in a year or two? Who can allow a 401k to lose huge percentages of its value in mere days? God. Do we really think “It’s mine?” God laughs. It’s on loan from him. Jesus then concludes with a very strong statement about our relationship with money. ¹³ “**No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.**” You might sum it up this way: Jesus is saying to his children, Think before you spend! Is this serving the people around me in a witnessing way? Is this honoring God? But is this really that important? If you started praying to a statue of a wolf, that’s a pretty serious issue, right? That’s a rejection of the true God. That’s idolatry. Well, do you realize that serving money is just as much idolatry – a rejection of God – as praying to a statue of a wolf? We might not bow down to it or pray to it, but when money becomes that which we look to for happiness, fulfillment, and security, guess what? That’s your God! What is it that brings happiness and fulfillment? Is the answer the clothes I wear, the vacations I can take, the success of my child in the classroom or on the ball field, the kind of car that I drive? And to attain those things, you look primarily to money and then you work harder and longer so that you can buy the house and the car, and go to the prestigious school, and get into the clubs and groups

that will make put your children ahead of their peers in the classroom and on the ball field. Guess what has become your master and your God? Money.

If the answer to “How can I feel secure and stable in this life?” is making sure you can live in a safe neighborhood, retire comfortably, and have good health insurance and life insurance, and to attain these things, you look primarily to money so that you can purchase them, guess what has become God? Money.

Look, here it is in a nutshell. You and I on average will live around 70-80 years, some more, some less. What happens then? We die. Does money solve that problem? No. In fact, each one of us will get to take exactly \$0 with us to God’s judgment seat. God tells you that what you need to pay your debt to him – the punishment for sin – and for you to be sinless before him so that you will enter heaven and not be thrown into hell. And then, he gifts it to us. Jesus comes and lives a life without sin. He suffers our punishment when he dies. And he credits you with his perfection when he rises. That’s the God all of us need and have. That is what gives us value and fulfillment. Are you rich, poor, sick, healthy, have insurance, no insurance, house, no house, car, no car, state champion, or never set foot on the field? It doesn’t matter. Heaven waits. All the wrongs are righted. All the hardships are in the distant past.

That’s the reason for Jesus’ words. Our time on this planet is just road time until we reach home. And so, Jesus instructs us to use the financial resources he’s given us for the trip to stay on the narrow path, and help others do the same. Yes, he wants us to enjoy the blessings he gives along the way – entertainment, natural beauty, rest, possessions, etc., but he demands that they are always secondary, so that they don’t lead us and others off the narrow path. Remember last week how Pastor Haugly shared those words of Jesus’ warning that there are those who think everything with God is OK, and are shocked when the door to heaven is closed and they are shut out? Serving money as god is certainly one of those things! We can have our membership at a church, put our kids in Christian school, but in our pursuit of money and the things money can buy, it’s God’s work and time with God that always get bumped, don’t think “Oh God understands.” No, when we honor someone or something above God, we have rejected God and lose all the gifts he won for us.

So, what does your bank statement say, what does your calendar say about who you serve? If it’s money, listen to Jesus’ invitation – come back! If money has become your God – come back. If it has enslaved you, repent and God will set you free. His gifts paid for that too!

But then change your approach when it comes to money. Think before you spend! Ask those questions: Is this serving others in a witnessing way? Does this honor God?

Learn to ask the question with every expenditure. Sometimes the answer is clearly “no.” Does buying this street drug to get high or this bottle to get drunk or this pornographic download serve in a witnessing way, or honor God? No. So don’t. Sometimes the answer is a clear yes: your gifts to God’s work, your offerings. They serve others in a witnessing way. They honor God! Clearly, yes! So don’t let those gifts be what gets cut out when inflation rises so that your cell service, cable package, eating out budget, and travel, and clothes budget, and Christmas gifts aren’t affected. And don’t forget to think before all the other expenditures. Earlier on I rattled off things that aren’t needs, but that we use money to buy – new car, house, Christmas gifts, snowmobile, club dues or memberships – understand something, these can all be things that don’t pass muster when we ask the question, “Does this serve others in a witnessing way, and does this honor God?” But sometimes they do. Can a Christian get a new car, buy a house, go on vacation, get a new pair of shoes even if they already have one, be in a sports club, and still have those expenditures serve in a witnessing way and honor God? Sure, but don’t assume that because it can, it is – think before you spend, ask the questions, before you make the decision.

Now maybe this is where you start to think, what a burden. God just wants my money, the church just wants my money. They don’t really care about me. Do you really think Jesus says these words to burden us or control us? No, when we listen, they will be a blessing. Let me ask you, from your experience, is it having lots of money that really brings fulfillment and value to a person? Are the Hollywood superstars truly fulfilled and happy, or the sports superstars? How about the entrepreneurs in the news each week? You don’t have to dig too deep to realize that many of them have miserable personal lives and strained relationships and very few real friends. Does that mean money makes you miserable? No, it’s about how you use it.

So, my parents weren’t wealthy by U.S. standards – we ate out maybe twice per year, never owned a new car, lived in a 1,200 square foot house that they didn’t own. Gave generously to church, helped others in need, sacrificed to pay for Christian education when there was no School Choice. I lived in a happy household. My parents were content. I know my dad is in heaven. I know I’ll be there one day too. That’s my parents, but I know other Christians who had great wealth, who used it to serve, who did enjoy many creature comforts that I didn’t have but shared that same contentedness. That’s what Jesus intends. Not to weigh us down, but to free us from slavery to money. Think before you spend: is it serving others in a witnessing way? Is it honoring God? For those who will listen, their relationship with God is preserved, God blessed them with the peace of contentment while here as they look ahead to the unimaginable wealth of heaven. So, listen and be blessed! Think before you spend. AMEN.