

LUKE

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Chapter Sixteen

This chapter is about maintaining right priorities.

Luke 16:1-8

*Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions. (2) "And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' (3) "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. (4) 'I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.' (5) "And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he began saying to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' (6) "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' (7) "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He *said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' (8) "And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.*

This episode was for the disciples only. Saying “a certain rich man” would bring to their mind a person who was greedy and had obtained his wealth by cheating others of what they had owned. Such a person would usually hire a manager or steward to manage his affairs. The owner would usually have been very careful in choosing such an agent. He should be honest and were chosen also because he was illiterate so he could not easily manipulate the books. Someone had reported to the rich man that his agent was squandering his possessions although we are not told what he was actually doing. The word used for squandering is the same one used to describe the actions of the prodigal son. The rich man brought in the agent and told him what he had heard about his mismanagement. He told the agent to give an accounting of what he had done and told him that he was fired. The rich man asks for the agent to give him the books so he can see what has been done.

Luke then reveals the agent’s inner thoughts that reveal him to be a cunning, dishonest person who is not willing to work for a living and he is too proud to beg for money. The verb tense used for “is taking away” means that a process is involved in removing him from employment so he has some time before he has to turn over the books. His thoughts reveal that he has no impulse to repent but he wants to find some way to save himself from a situation in which he could not find employment. Verse four reveals his “light bulb” moment when he comes up with a scheme to put himself into favor with the people who owe money. He thinks if he endears himself to the people then they will invite him to come live with them.

Verse five states that the agent then begins to bring in each of the people who owe money to the rich man so he can deal with each in privacy. The first one owes 100 measures of oil, which is a considerable sum. It is estimated to be about a half share of rent for almost 200 acres and that is about twenty times the size of an average family plot. So these people are not peasants but people of considerable means to have obtained such loans. The agent then tells the person to write into the books that he really owes fifty talents. The second person owing money to the rich man said that he owed 100 measures of wheat that is not as big a loan as the first but was still considerable. The manager told the man to write that he owed 80 measures of wheat. The manager was probably removing his usury from the total amount that was owed by the people to the rich man. In the first case, this addition to the load would be 100 % and in the second case the addition would have been 20 %. Note the agent did not manage the books himself but had those who owed money to change the amounts. This was shrewd behavior for the rich man would probably still get back all that he was really owed and the people owing the rich man would think favorably toward the manager and help him in his worldly pursuits. The end result is that everyone benefited.

It is then the last sentence that has caused problems with interpreters. Some translations insert "the Lord" in verse eight rather than "his master". It is when one thinks that Jesus is saying that He approves of this behavior that problems arise. However the word "Lord" just means "master" and does not have to imply Jesus is quoting Himself in verse eight. This episode has given interpreters many problems over the years for surely Jesus would not praise unlawful behavior. However this is not a lesson in how His disciples should act but a lesson on how the world functions as a warning to the disciples. Thus this was praiseworthy behavior for the manager from the world's viewpoint. We interpret that Jesus enters His comments in the last half of verse 8 as He warns His disciples that such "worldlings" (people of the world) are shrewder in actions among their people than His disciples are among their people. He is certainly not encouraging them to act accordingly but to be wary of such behavior among worldlings. We need to all be very careful in dealings with the world.

Luke 16:9-13

"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings. (10) "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. (11) "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? (12) "And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? (13) "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Jesus now begins to teach His disciples how their behavior is to be different from that of the world. The first sentence is a bit hard to interpret unless we assume that this is a statement by Jesus as it must be for it starts with "I say" and that person is certainly Jesus. Jesus always treats worldly goods as insignificant or trivial. How anyone deals with unrighteous wealth on earth will dictate how God rewards them in heaven. So who are the friends with whom Jesus says we

should use the worldly goods? Unless He is saying that we should use our wealth in worldly fashions, and that is certainly not what I can assume, the friends must be the poor as that fits with His previous statements about helping them. Jesus is then saying that the world's goods will ultimately fail so we should use those possessions entrusted to us by God for the good of those who do not have much. Then the "they" of the last part of verse 9 would be the people and/or angels in heaven as we are received into our eternal dwelling places. We will read about angels bringing Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham (16:22) so such could be that meaning. When we interpret verse nine this way, the remainder of the verses falls into place with clear meanings.

The verses 10-13 also build upon the actions of the previous agent in his unfaithful dealings with the rich man's worldly goods. Jesus gives three aphorisms, which are brief statements of a principle. The basic principle is that trustworthiness is rewarded with more trust and untrustworthiness results in denial of trust. However the applications are not worldly but on the eschatological scale. All three assert that how anyone deals with what God has entrusted to His children in this world will result in how He treats those children in the next world.

The implication is that this unrighteous wealth does not belong to the presumed earthly owner but everything belongs to God and is on temporary loan to His children. All that God's people have is to be used in service to others and His glory. The children of light have broken free of the hold that worldly possessions can have on people. Again, the principle is that we have died to self and take up our cross daily. Disciples of Jesus Christ cannot operate in the world as the person who had so much that he thought he had to build new barns (12:20). It was possible for a slave to be owned by two masters but he could not lovingly serve both of them for conflicts would occur when he had to make a choice. The Bible clearly speaks against anyone being double minded such as:

- Psa 119:113 *I hate those who are double-minded, But I love Your law.*
- James 1:6-8 *But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

Luke 16:14-18

Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. (15) And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. (16) "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. (17) "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail. (18) "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.

Since the Pharisees loved money, their reactions to these statements of Jesus are what we would expect. They pretended to be righteous but they scoffed at the teaching of Jesus about Mammon (or unrighteous wealth). Jesus has already accused them of being full of greed and wickedness

(11:39). Now Jesus elaborates on their desire to appear righteous before men while God knows that their hearts are far from Him. Such worldly possessions as characterized broadly as Mammon are highly esteemed among men and they are detestable in God's sight when used only for personal pleasure. Certainly Mammon is an idol to the Pharisees and the word "abomination" or "detestable" has been used in reference to idolatry:

Deut 7:25-26 "The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, or you will be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God. (26) "You shall not bring an abomination into your house, and like it come under the ban; you shall utterly detest it and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is something banned.

There was a break in the proclamation of God at the end of the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God. Jesus proclaimed that John was the greatest prophet (7:26-28) but that John's immersion baptism for repentance was superseded by the work of the Holy Spirit (1:5; 19:1-7). The spread of the popularity of Jesus so that vast crowds were following Him shows that many people were trying to force their way into the Kingdom of God rather than being invited as we have seen is required. But the coming of Jesus after the preaching of John does not mean that the Law is to be totally superseded. Just as it is impossible for heaven and earth to pass away, even the smallest element of the writings of the Law will also not be invalidated by the preaching of the Kingdom of God. As an example of the permanence of the Law, Luke lists one example in that marriage is a permanent establishment of God.

Luke 16:19-21

"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. (20) "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, (21) and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

Jesus is now giving a parable to illustrate the eternal value of what He has been teaching as opposed to what the world teaches. What a tremendous contrast between these two people! The garments of the rich man are those of a king: *The weight of the gold earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple robes which were on the kings of Midian, and besides the neck bands that were on their camels' necks.* (Judges 8:26) The fine linen was the most delicate and expensive fabric in the ancient world. As he was living in splendor probably means that he was enjoying the finest food and celebrating each day like the rich fool (12:19). This description also makes him like the generation of the flood:

Luke 17:26-27 "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: (27) they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

The poor man is a tremendous contrast and is the only person given a name in all the parables of Jesus. The Greek form of Lazarus is Eleazar and, in Hebrew, it means "God is my help" although the original readers would probably have not understood that meaning. However Jesus may have chosen that name for the contrast between the rich man (nameless) who helped himself and Lazarus whom God helped. It is not clear what is the meaning of the word "laid" for it could be

intransitive meaning that he was ill or crippled. It could also be transitive and mean that some people put him there hoping that he would receive some alms from the house of the rich person. The “gate” is a word used especially for very large gates such as was at the entrances to temples or large dwellings. Lazarus was covered with sores so his plight would have been very obvious to the rich man when he walked out of the gate. He was hoping that he could get some of the crumbs falling from the rich man’s table. But the rich man will not even throw out some of his scraps for Lazarus. His situation even became worse as dogs came by to lick his sores. These would not be the sweet little puppies we might envision but the dogs were considered unclean and traveled in packs around the towns. Jesus paints a picture of someone who has all he can dream to have compared with someone living in a nightmare.

Luke 16:22-24

*"Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. (23) "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. (24) "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'*

Of course death strikes everyone and it took over these two men and what a contrast of the fate of both men. In this time period there were two locations for the dead. One was called Abraham’s bosom that was for the repentant only and the other was Hades that was a place of continual punishment of unrepentant sinners. Jewish literature describes the afterlife of the wicked to offer torment, the dead being able to see others, thirst, and flames. There is no mention of the burial and tomb for the rich man but it would have been a great ceremony with his friends and family present and he would have been buried in an elaborate tomb. But the rich man awoke to find himself in torment in Hades! The torment is exponentially greater than any that could be suffered by anyone on earth and it is irreversible. To make his torment even worse he could see Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom. Lazarus died and was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The readers would have known that these were God’s angels sent to take His children home to Him.

The details reveal that the rich man knew Lazarus by name so he would have been very familiar with the plight of Lazarus outside his gate. The rich man never helped Lazarus but now he thinks that Lazarus should help him. However there is no mention that Lazarus was aware of the situation of the rich man. The rich man called to Abraham to send Lazarus to give him some aid in his torment. He thought that even if Lazarus would dip his finger in water and cool off his tongue that he would get some relief. The rich man called Abraham “father” because of his Jewish roots, but John warned against such a presumptuous use of the word:

Luke 3:8"Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham."

Jesus told His disciples to pray to the Father but such a relationship involves being His disciple and has no reference to one’s physical roots.

Luke 16:25-31

*"But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. (26) 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' (27) "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house-- (28) for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' (29) "But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' (30) "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' (31) "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"*

Abraham replied to the rich man and addressed him as child, which is a term of affection since the man does have Jewish roots, but he will not offer him any assistance. Abraham does offer him an explanation for the current situation of the two people based upon their worldly life. The rich man had an abundant life on earth and now he is suffering forever. Lazarus suffered on earth and will be comforted forever. To the rich man's credit he does not offer excuses but accepts the answer. He then begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house where he can witness to his five brothers so they will not come to the place of torment. He may still be thinking of himself from the perspective that if someone had come back from the dead to warn him then he would not be in such a situation. Abraham then tells the formerly rich man that there is a great chasm separating the two places. There is no possibility for people from either station to cross over to the other. Abraham told him that his brothers have the witnesses of Moses and the Prophets and can hear what they have to say. The Scriptures give plenty of warnings and the brothers should listen to them. If they will read the warnings of the prophets they would know of their worldly failures to meet the needs of the poor and the resultant wrath of God.

The rich man then tells Abraham that if someone comes back from the dead to warn his brothers that they will repent. But Abraham replies that they have all the witnesses they need and even if someone rises from the dead they will still not be able to hear the truth. Hardened hearts need an inward change rather than outward witnesses. Some today also believe that the Scriptures need some help like theater performances or entertainment to get through to people. But the people need a new heart before they can hear the Word of God.

Matt 15:18-20 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. (19) "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. (20) "These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."