

Luke 16:1 ¶ And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

Luke 16:2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

Luke 16:3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

Luke 16:4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

Luke 16:5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors *unto him*, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

Luke 16:6 And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

Luke 16:7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

Luke 16:8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

The previous chapter ended with the parable of the prodigal son. This chapter opens with another parable concerning an unjust steward. "A certain rich man" has a steward, a man that oversees the affairs of his household, that has been caught cheating his master. The master calls the steward in to give him his notice and asks for an accounting of his records.

The response of the steward proves his guilt. He immediately begins to figure out how to garner the favor of those that are in debt to the rich man in order make them beholding to him. He was determined to avoid providing for himself through hard labor or begging. He proceeds to call in those that are in debt to the rich man and having them write new bills of purchase for amounts much less than they really owed. It seems that the rich man was well aware of what the steward had done and even acknowledged that the man had acted "wisely" in preparing for his future unemployment. It's hard for me to accept the term "wise" as descriptive of actions that resulted in cheating his employer. When I looked at the definition for "wise," it referenced making use of what you know to choose the best ends and means for accomplishing your goal. To that end I can acknowledge the wisdom of the steward, but it is still surprising that the rich man would reference his actions as wise instead of criminal.

Jesus then observes that the "children of this world," those who reject God's authority, are wiser than the "children of light," those who profess to follow God in faith and obedience. I think this points out a very significant truth concerning the church today. If we who profess to love the Lord would put as much thought, energy and passion into serving God as those in the world invest in serving the gods of this world (including self), I believe a great revival would ensue.

Luke 16:9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Jesus now begins to explain how this parable applies to us. The wording of this verse is a bit confusing, but in light of the context I believe that the NLT has the right idea: *“I tell you, use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. In this way, your generosity stores up a reward for you in heaven.”*

I like Chuck Smith’s comments on this verse: *“We’ve got to take advantage of our opportunities now to lay up heavenly treasure. We know that we came into the world naked, and we’re going out of the world naked. We brought nothing into the world and it is certain we are going to take nothing out. So if I’m going to set myself up in the heavenly kingdom, I must do it now and I must take advantage of the opportunities that I have now in order set myself up for the heavenly kingdom. And this is exactly what Jesus is saying. Make use of the unrighteousness of mammon. Make use of this filthy lucre. This money that God places at your disposal, make use of it in such a way that you will be reaping eternal benefits from it.”*

I also like the following quote from David Guzik: *“The dishonest steward is a praiseworthy example on several points. First, he knew he would be called to account for his life and he took that seriously. Christians should take seriously the idea that they will be called to account, and that idea can be a joy if we are about our Master’s business! Second, he took advantage of his present position to arrange a comfortable future.”*

Luke 16:10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

Luke 16:11 If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

Luke 16:12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?

Luke 16:13 No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

The basic focus of the teaching is on morality. I think Jesus is saying that a person is either moral or immoral—he/she can either be trusted to do what is right or not. I liked this comment by JFB: *“Fidelity depends not on the amount entrusted, but on the sense of responsibility.”*

Those who are moral are servants of God and those who are immoral are servants of the world and the prince of this world. Jesus is saying that you cannot faithfully serve two masters—God and mammon (money, wealth). You have to choose. To serve God is to yield control of all yourself and all you possess to Him. To serve “mammon” will lead to justifying whatever it takes to possess more and more.

Obviously, no “Christian” is perfect; every Christian sins. The defining difference regards who we serve. We cannot continue in immoral practices and truly serve God. The Christian will strive to do his/her best to serve God in love with the desire to honor and glorify Him. When he/she does wrong, he will ask for forgiveness and start afresh.

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

I also think it is important to note that it is not the possession of money that is wrong, it is when the money has possession of you that it is wrong.

*1 Timothy 6:10 “For **the love of money** is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”*

David Guzik makes another very astute observation: “If you will sacrifice for the sake of money, but will not sacrifice for the sake of Jesus, don’t deceive yourself: money is your God.”

It is also significant that the Lord makes a distinction between “unrighteous mammon” and “true riches.” True riches are those that will benefit you for eternity.

Matthew 6:19–21 “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Luke 16:14 And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.

Luke 16:15 And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

As usual, the Pharisees were not pleased with what Jesus said and openly scorned Him. Their practices (e.g., using the temple sacrifices to their benefit to make money) identified them as covetous.

Jesus just as openly and boldly identified their sin. He declared that though they justified their actions before men, God knows their hearts. Though they had managed to earn the esteem of men, they were an abomination in the sight of God. The Greek for “abomination” is describing them as idolaters.

The truth that God knows our hearts is very humbling. I, for one, take great comfort in knowing that God knows me inside-out and loves me anyway. Most of us shy away from confessing our sin because of shame and not wanting to admit our sin. It is so freeing to know that there is nothing I can hide from Him and that confessing my sin is but acknowledging what He already knows; I can’t

be shamed any more than I already have been. He wants to help me be an overcomer and redeem the time that I have left.

I think the example of Jesus is powerful. There are many examples in the scripture of men of God publicly denouncing sin and sinners, and yet the scripture tells us that we are to speak the truth in love.

*Ephesians 4:11–15 “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But **speaking the truth in love**, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:”*

I think that what we have lost sight of in these days of “political correctness” is how this love is made manifest. Jesus was concerned about the souls of the Pharisees. Without understanding that they were sinners in need of a Savior, there was no hope for their eternal future. I am concerned about the growing choice of many churches today to join those who follow false gods in providing humanitarian aid to those in need without also telling them the good news of the gospel. Humanitarian aid is a good thing, but the relief it provides is temporary at best. The primary need of humanity is their need for salvation, a need that can only be met through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Aid given in the name of Jesus that spreads the good news of the love of Jesus has the potential of permanent deliverance.

I am also concerned with the hesitancy of many in the pulpit to identify false teaching and teachers; this too is speaking the truth in love. So many in the church today are still feeding on milk and do not possess the needed spiritual discernment to make such identifications. Those that have been appointed shepherds to the flock need to protect the flock from the wolves that would seek to defraud them and destroy their faith.

Luke 16:16 The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

Luke 16:17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

With these verses Jesus is declaring that the times have changed. He identifies the time through the ministry of John the Baptists as that of the law and prophets. During that time the focus was on obedience to the law of God. The ministry of Jesus introduced a new time by preaching the kingdom of God and notes that everyone wants to get into this kingdom.

Though this new time was to be characterized by faith, it did not negate the law. Jesus declares that the law is more enduring than the continued existence of the

earth. The beautiful truth is that Jesus came to fulfill the law on our behalf and offer that provision to us as a gift dependent only upon our faith.

Luke 16:18 Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.

It is interesting that Jesus chooses marriage as exemplifying the continuing validity of the law. It seems that just as today, the ruling authorities, the Pharisees, wanted to establish parameters concerning divorce according to their own purposes—not God’s. Without remarking on any extenuating circumstances, Jesus declares that God’s law states that husband and wife are joined as one for life. Anyone that breaks that law is guilty of adultery.

Genesis 2:24 “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

Matthew 19:4–6 “And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

It seems the subject of marriage is a core issue important to the heart of God. We in America today have chosen to reject God’s law on this important life issue. In fact, we have chosen to embrace a culture that is in total defiance of His will. We have chosen to declare as decent and natural what God calls indecent and unnatural. Sadly, we will continue to reap the consequences that result from such actions that will surely be followed by the hand of His judgment.

Leviticus 20:13 “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.”

Romans 1:24–27 “Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.”

Luke 16:19 ¶ There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

Luke 16:20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

Luke 16:21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

Luke 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

Luke 16:23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

Luke 16:24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

Luke 16:25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

Luke 16:26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence.

Next we come to one of the most famous of Jesus' teachings. It is the story of the rich man and Lazarus. I personally believe this teaching is about real people, and Jesus tells us the name of the beggar who is actually richer than the rich man. Even if you only accept it as another of Jesus' parables, you know that Jesus only speaks the truth. From it we learn many important things about life after death.

The teaching begins by identifying the lifestyle of the rich man, a man who enjoys the best the life has to offer. He can shop at the most elite stores, wear the most expensive clothing and afford the choicest, freshest food in abundance. In contrast, we meet the beggar Lazarus, a man covered with sores. Notice that he is "laid at the rich man's gate. I would assume that someone who cares about him has placed him there in hopes that he might be given some of the scraps of food left over from the rich man's meals. We are also told that the only comfort the man got from his sores was that the dogs licked them.

Though we aren't told how long this situation endured, we learn that both men died. Angels came and carried the beggar Lazarus into Abraham's bosom; the rich man was buried. The rich man is seen suffering the torments of hell and looking at Abraham who is described as far away from him and comforting Lazarus. Interestingly, the rich man knows who Abraham is. He calls out for Abraham to have mercy on him and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue; he is suffering from the flames around him. Abraham reminds the man how good he had it in his lifetime and how bad things were for Lazarus; the situation has now been reversed. Abraham shows compassion in his tone, but says that there is a great gulf that separates them that none can cross.

I think it is significant to note that the rich man knew Lazarus by name. He doesn't hesitate to ask Abraham to send Lazarus in service to him in his misery, yet he had done nothing to help Lazarus in his misery though he could easily afford to do so with very little if any inconvenience to himself. The application to us is obvious.

Luke 16:27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

Luke 16:28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Luke 16:29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

Luke 16:30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

Luke 16:31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Realizing that he has no hope, the thoughts of the rich man go to his five brothers. He asks Abraham to send Lazarus to testify to them so they wouldn't end up in hell with him. Abraham declares that they have the testimony of Moses and the prophets. The rich man begs saying that isn't enough; if only one would return from the dead and tell them the truth they would repent in belief. Abraham stands firm. If they refuse to heed the testimony of Moses and the prophets recorded in scripture, they will not repent even if one returned from the dead to witness to them. This truth was illustrated by the response of the chief priests when Jesus raised another Lazarus from the dead. They refused to admit they were wrong in spite of the obvious evidence.

*John 12:9–11 “Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. **But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death** Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.”*

This is a teaching that is full of comfort and yet terrifying at the same time. Jesus is affirming that this life isn't all there is; there is life after death. Those who have passed on to the next life do so with their conscience and memory intact. It is actually heartbreaking to hear the pleas of the rich man and to hear him express the concern he has for his family.

The dead went to one of two places that was separated by a huge impassable gulf—in this teaching called Abraham's bosom and hell. I believe it was natural for the Jewish audience to identify the place of comfort as Abraham's bosom since he was the one God chose to father the nation of Israel. Jesus referenced this place as paradise when talking to the repentant thief on the cross.

Luke 23:43 “And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Generally, the term “sheol” in Hebrew and “hades” in Greek are used to reference the grave, the place of departed spirits. Paul tells us that when Jesus ascended to return to heaven after experiencing three days and nights in “the lower parts of the earth” (in Abraham's bosom), He took those that had been held captive, the body of believers with Him. Now the believer is absent from the body and present with the Lord.

*Ephesians 4:7–10 “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, **When he ascended up on high, he led captivity***

captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)"

2 Corinthians 5:6–8 "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

Though "hades" is usually translated "hell" in the scripture, it is not the lake of fire. In fact, John tells us in Revelation that "hell" is cast into the lake of fire after the white throne judgment.

Revelation 20:14 "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

It's significant to note that the rich man was tormented by the flame even though separated from his body of flesh. He is tormented by flame though not yet in the "lake of fire." It's also significant to note that in his plea for mercy is acknowledgement that he deserves his fate.

The fact that the gulf is impassable is a statement of the truth that there are no second chances after death. You cannot be prayed out or purchase your way out of a non-existent purgatory.

In his plea for his brothers, we also learn that he could not go back and appear to his brothers himself. People who believe they can call back the dead are opening themselves up to demonic deception.

It is comforting to note that angels carried the soul of Lazarus to the place of comfort. The believer has nothing to fear in death; he/she has only to anticipate joy and comfort beyond anything they have ever known.

1 Corinthians 2:9 "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."