**The Gospel of Luke**

**Lesson 13** Luke 16 The Shrewd Manager/Rich Man and Lazarus!

**Questions:**

1. What important truth did you learn from the lecture, and how does it apply to your life?
2. Read Wiersbe pages 45-56.

Why is the Lord concerned about how we use money? What can be assumed about the person who is unfaithful in the way they use money? Explain your answer.

1. Read Luke 16:1-15 along with the article below entitled, “The Parable of the Unjust (Shrewd) Manager!”

The Parable of the Unjust Steward can be found in Luke 16:1–13. The text can be broken down into two parts: the parable (verses 1–8) and the application (verses 9–13). Luke 16:1 identifies that Jesus is speaking to His disciples, but there is a suggestion that His audience is mixed—disciples and Pharisees. Luke 16:14 states that the Pharisees “heard all these things and ridiculed [Jesus].” We also see in verse 1 that Jesus “also” said to the disciples; the “also” would suggest that this parable is connected to the previous three in Luke 15 and that the audience was a mixed crowd of disciples and Pharisees.

It is important to know to whom Jesus is addressing this parable. The parable is for the benefit of the disciples, but there is also a not-so-subtle critique of the Pharisees, as was evident in Luke 15. Verse 14 is Luke’s commentary on the motivation of the Pharisees, and in verse 15 we see our Lord condemn their motives. And what was the Pharisees’ motivation? They were those who were “lovers of money” and who “justify themselves before men” and who exalted that which was an “abomination before God.”

With that as a backdrop, let’s look at the parable. It’s a fairly simple, if somewhat unorthodox, parable from Jesus. The story is simple, but the setting is unusual. In most of Jesus’ parables, the protagonist is either representative of God, Christ, or some other positive character. In this parable the characters are all wicked—the steward and the man whose possessions he manages are both unsavory characters. This should alert us to the fact that Jesus is not exhorting us to emulate the behavior of the characters but is trying to expound on a larger principle.

The parable begins with a rich man calling his steward before him to inform him that he will be relieving him of his duties for mismanaging his master’s resources. A steward is a person who manages the resources of another. The steward had authority over all of the master’s resources and could transact business in his name. This requires the utmost level of trust in the steward. Now, it may not be apparent at this point in the parable (but is made more evident later on), but the master is probably not aware of the steward’s dishonesty. The steward is being released for apparent mismanagement, not fraud. This explains why he is able to conduct a few more transactions before he is released and why he is not immediately tossed out on the street or executed.

The steward, realizing that he will soon be without a job, makes some shrewd deals behind his master’s back by reducing the debt owed by several of the master’s debtors in exchange for shelter when he is eventually put out. When the master becomes aware of what the wicked servant had done, he commends him for his “shrewdness.”
In His application of the story in the remaining verses, Jesus begins by saying, “For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light” (Luke 16:8). Jesus is drawing a contrast between the “sons of the world” (i.e., unbelievers) and the “sons of light” (believers). Unbelievers are wiser in the things of this world than believers are about the things of the world to come. The unjust steward, once he knew he was about to be put out, maneuvered to collect some quick cash, cheat his master (who more than likely was cheating his customers), and make friends of his master’s debtors—who would then be obligated to care for him once he lost his job.

What does this have to do with believers being wise about the life to come? Let’s look at verse 9: “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.” Jesus is encouraging His followers to be generous with their wealth in this life so that in the life to come their new friends will receive them “into eternal dwellings.” This is similar to Jesus’ teaching on wealth in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus exhorts His followers to lay up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19–21).

The term *unrighteous* (or *worldly*) *wealth* seems to strike readers the wrong way. But Jesus is not saying that believers should gain wealth unrighteously and then be generous with it. “Unrighteous” in reference to wealth can refer to 1) the means in acquiring wealth; 2) the way in which one desires to use the wealth; or 3) the corrupting influence wealth can have that often leads people to commit unrighteous acts. Given the way in which Jesus employs the term, the third explanation seems the most likely. Wealth is not inherently evil, but the love of money can lead to all sorts of sin (1 Timothy 6:10).
So, the principle that Jesus is trying to convey is one of a just steward rather than an unjust one. The unjust steward saw his master’s resources as a means for his own personal enjoyment and advancement. Conversely, Jesus wants His followers to be just, righteous stewards. If we understand the principle that everything we own is a gift from God, then we realize that God is the owner of everything and that we are His stewards. As such, we are to use the Master’s resources to further the Master’s goals. In this specific case, we are to be generous with our wealth and use it for the benefit of others.
Jesus then goes on to expand in verses 10–13 the principle given in verse 9. If one is faithful in “little” (i.e., “unrighteous” wealth), then one will be faithful in much. Similarly, if one is dishonest in little, he will also be dishonest in much. If we can’t be faithful with earthly wealth, which isn’t even ours to begin with, then how can we be entrusted with “true riches”? The “true riches” here is referring to stewardship and responsibility in God’s kingdom along with all the accompanying heavenly rewards.

The climax of Jesus’ application is verse 13: “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” (see also Matthew 6:24). If God is our Master, then our wealth will be at His disposal. In other words, the faithful and just steward whose Master is God will employ that wealth in building up the kingdom of God.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Remember, when Jesus told a parable, the purpose was to convey to his audience one or two fundamental principles by which to live. Thus, in the parable of the unjust or shrewd manager, Jesus is teaching truths regarding stewardship.

1. What does it mean to be a steward?
2. What prompted the steward to decrease the amount owed by his master’s debtors? For what reason does the rich man commend his manager? What is the lesson/principle Jesus is teaching?
3. Verses 8 and 9 state, “For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly (ESV ‘unrighteous’) wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”
4. Distinguish between ‘the people of this world’ and ‘the people of the light.’
5. What is meant by worldly or unrighteous wealth?
6. What is the key lesson you learned regarding the use of worldly wealth?
7. Read Matthew 6:19-20. What is the key principle taught in these verses?
8. In verses 10-13, Jesus expands on the principle of faithful stewardship. What do you learn (include in your explanation the concept of “true riches”)?
9. Of what are you a steward? How are you doing as a steward of the resources God has given to you?
10. Read Luke 16:16-18 entitled Additional Teachings along with Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:9. Notice that Jesus reverts to the Law. Remember that the legalistic Pharisees are in the audience, and Jesus has just condemned them, who claimed to keep the Law. Verses 16 and 17 state, “the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.”
11. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. Why do you think Jesus distinguishes between the message proclaimed by the Law and the Prophets compared to the gospel message preached by John the Baptist and Jesus? What was the purpose of the Law (Galatians 3:24-25)?
12. Read Matthew 11:12 and Luke 13:24. What did Jesus mean when he said, “Everyone is forcing his way into it” (the kingdom of God)?
13. Read 2 Corinthians 13:5-6. Examine yourself spiritually. Have you ‘forced’ your way into the kingdom of God? To what internal evidence can you point?
14. To what Law did Jesus point to affirm the continuing authority of the Law? Why do you think he chose this particular law?
15. Read Luke 5:17-31 along with the article entitled, “What should we learn from the rich man and Lazarus?”

Luke 16:19-31 contains the account of a very rich man who lived a life of extreme luxury. Laid outside the gate of this rich man’s house, however, was an extremely poor man named Lazarus who simply hoped “to eat what fell from the rich man’s table” (v. 21). The rich man was completely indifferent to the plight of Lazarus, showing him no love, sympathy, or compassion whatsoever. Eventually, they both died. Lazarus went to heaven, and the rich man went to hell. Appealing to “Father Abraham” in heaven, the rich man requested that Lazarus be sent to cool his tongue with a drop of water to lessen his “agony in this fire.” The rich man also asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to warn his brothers to repent so that they would never join him in hell. Both requests were denied. Abraham told the rich man that if his brothers did not believe in Scripture, neither would they believe a messenger, even if he came straight from heaven.

There is some question as to whether this story is a true, real-life account or a parable, since two of its characters are named (making it unique among parables). Parable or not, however, there is much we can learn from this passage:

First of all, Jesus teaches here that heaven and hell are both real, literal places. Sadly, many preachers shy away from uncomfortable topics such as hell. Some even teach “universalism” – the belief that everyone goes to heaven. Yet Christ spoke about hell a great deal, as did Paul, Peter, John, Jude, and the writer of Hebrews. The Bible is clear that every person who has ever lived will spend eternity in either heaven or hell. Like the rich man in the story, multitudes today are complacent in their conviction that all is well with their soul, and many will hear our Savior tell them otherwise when they die (Matthew 7:23).

This story also illustrates that once we cross the eternal horizon, that’s it. There are no more chances. The transition to our eternal state takes place the moment we die (2 Corinthians 5:8; Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23). When believers die, they are immediately in the conscious fellowship and joys of heaven. When unbelievers die, they are just as immediately in the conscious pain, suffering, and torment of hell. Notice the rich man didn’t ask for his brothers to pray for his release from some purgatorial middle ground, thereby expediting his journey to heaven. He knew he was in hell, and he knew why. That’s why his requests were merely to be comforted and to have a warning sent to his brothers. He knew there was no escape. He was eternally separated from God, and Abraham made it clear to him that there was no hope of ever mitigating his pain, suffering, or sorrow. Those in hell will perfectly recollect missed opportunities and their rejection of the gospel.

Like many these days who buy into the “prosperity gospel,” the rich man wrongly saw his material riches as evidence of God’s love and blessing. Likewise, he believed the poor and destitute, like Lazarus, were cursed by God. Yet, as the apostle James exhorted, “You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter” (James 5:5). Not only do riches not get one into heaven, but they have the power to separate a person from God in a way that few other things can. Riches are deceitful (Mark 4:19). It is certainly not impossible for the very rich to enter heaven (many heroes of the Bible were wealthy), but Scripture is clear that it is very hard (Matthew 19:23-24; Mark 10:23-25; Luke 18:24-25).

True followers of Christ will not be indifferent to the plight of the poor like the rich man in this story was. God loves the poor and is offended when His children neglect them (Proverbs 17:5; 22:9, 22-23; 29:7; 31:8-9). In fact, those who show mercy to the poor are in effect ministering to Christ personally (Matthew 25:35-40). Christians are known by the fruit they bear. The Holy Spirit’s residence in our hearts will most certainly impact how we live and what we do.

Abraham’s words in verses 29 and 31 referring to “Moses and the Prophets” (Scripture) confirms that understanding the revealed Word of God has the power to turn unbelief into faith (Hebrews 4:12; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). Furthermore, knowing Scripture helps us to understand that God’s children, like Lazarus, can suffer while on this earth—suffering is one of the many tragic consequences of living in a sinful and fallen world.

The Bible says our earthly lives are a “mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14). Our earthly sojourn is exceedingly brief. Perhaps the greatest lesson to learn from this story, then, is that when death comes knocking on our door there is only one thing that matters: *our relationship with Jesus Christ*. “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” (Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36). Eternal life is only found in Christ. “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11-12). The truth is, if we wish to live apart from God during our time on earth, He will grant us our wish for eternity as well. As one pastor aptly said, “If you board the train of unbelief, you will have to take it all the way to its destination.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. From the article above, list several key truths that you learn from this story about the rich man and Lazarus. Identify the most important truth!
2. What do you learn from the following verses?
* Proverbs 22:9
* Proverbs 22:22-23
* Proverbs 29:7
* Proverbs 31:8-9
* Matthew 19:23-24
* Mark 4:19
1. Considering this story and the many biblical references you have just read, what changes do you plan on making in your “investment/giving strategy”?
2. Read Matthew 7:13-14 along with Revelation 20:11-15. There are two roads/paths through this life. One leads to life and blessing. The other one leads to death and destruction.
3. One must enter through the narrow gate to be on the road that leads to life. The Bible says only a few find it. How does one enter the narrow gate?
4. On which road are you traveling?
1. “What is the meaning of the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13)?”Got Questions Ministries, accessed July 9, 2022, [https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-unjust-steward.html] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “What should we learn from the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16?”Got Questions Ministries, accessed July 11, 2022, [https://www.gotquestions.org/rich-man-and-Lazarus.html] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)