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Life: A Stewardship From God

LUKE 16:1-13

Introduction

1. What is your life?
2. If you or I took the time to evaluate our lives from their beginning to the point we are at in the present moment, how would we evaluate them?
 - a. What is the purpose of your life?
 - b. For what are you living?
 - c. Where do you hope to go from here?
 - d. Is it evident by the choices you are making?
3. In our Scripture reading this morning from Luke 16, Jesus tells a parable about a man, a steward or household manager, who is suddenly told by the wealthy man for whom he works that he no longer has a job.
4. In this parable, we see his assessment of his present situation and the plan he puts together for his future.
5. Ultimately, his master praises him for his shrewd action.
6. From this parable, Jesus teaches us some valuable lessons concerning our own lives.
7. Let's look at the parable in order to better understand what happens and then at the lessons which Jesus wants us to learn.

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I. The Parable of the Unrighteous Steward

A. THE STEWARD'S FIRING

“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. “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.’” (Luke 16:1–2, NASB95)

1. In Jesus’ day, the steward or manager was the person who controlled the resources and expenditures for an estate.
2. Such a person relieved the owner of the routine management of the estate.
3. The nature of his job made it easy for him to misappropriate funds for his own benefit.
4. Someone went to the owner of this particular estate and accused his steward of “squandering” or “wasting” his master’s possessions.
5. The owner summoned his steward and said, “What is this I hear about you?” (v. 2).
6. He told the steward that he wanted to see the books — “give me an accounting of your management” (v. 2b).
7. Why? Because he was fired! — “you can no longer be manager” (v. 2c).
8. If you have ever been fired, you know that it is not a pleasant experience.
 - a. You are suddenly without a job and there are bills to pay.
 - b. If you have a family to support, it only adds more stress to the situation.

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B. HIS PLAN TO SURVIVE

“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. ‘I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.’” (Luke 16:3–4, NASB95)

1. He suddenly begins to examine his prospects.

2. Because he is not accustomed to manual labor, he says, “I am not strong enough to dig” (v. 3b) — the toughest form of manual labor.
3. The only other option was to beg, which he said he was ashamed to do.
 - a. This man associated with the wealthy.
 - b. How would it look if one day he were on the street corner asking for money?
4. He needed to find employment from sympathetic business associates.
5. Suddenly, a plan came to mind — “I know what I shall do” (v. 4a) — “I’ve got it!”
6. His plan would cause those who owed money to his master to respond favorably toward him after he was let go, and take him in.

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“And he summoned each one of his master’s debtors, and he began saying to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ “And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ “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.’” (Luke 16:5–7, NASB95)

7. The steward went through the bills one debtor at a time.
8. He has each debtor state the amount of debt they owe his master.
9. He then determines how much to lessen the debt.
10. By having each debtor state the amount they owe they will better appreciate the reduction they have received.
11. The best explanation for what this steward does is that he is removing his own commission which he had been charging each debtor.
12. In this way, he sacrifices his own money and not that of his master.
13. By lessening each debtor’s financial burden, he hopes to create future goodwill toward himself once he no longer has a job.
14. The first of the two debtors owes 100 measures of oil — a significant debt.

- a. This would have been the equivalent of about 875 gallons in our system of measurement — the yield of nearly 100 olive trees.
 - b. The price for this much olive oil would have been around 1,000 denarii, approximately three years of wages for the average laborer.
 - c. The manager tells the debtor to act quickly and reduce the note by half — 50 measures of oil.
 - d. The debtor writes out the new note in his own hand, so that the transaction looks original.
 - e. We can only imagine the gratitude of the debtor with his new bill.
15. The second debtor owed 100 measures of wheat, the equivalent of one year's salary.
- a. The manager reduces his bill by 20%.
 - b. As with the previous debtor, this man writes out his new bill for 80 measures of wheat.
 - c. He too, is most likely pleased with this reduced amount.

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“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.” (Luke 16:8, NASB95)

1. As Jesus draws the parable to a close, we find the master praising his manager — not because of his “unrighteousness” but for his “shrewdness.”
2. What the manager did was wrong, unjust.
3. This is why Jesus refers to him as “a son of this world (age)” and not a “son of light.”
4. What is it about his shrewdness that the master finds praiseworthy?
 - a. It is the fact that when the manager realized his future looked very bleak, he did what he could, even though what he did may not have seemed like much.
 - b. This man's master praises him for his ingenuity in figuring out a way to

provide for his future even though he is soon to be without a job.

5. Jesus' point is that this man who is a "son of this world" is more prudent in planning for the only future with which he is concerned than God's people, "sons of light," are in planning for their eternal future with Him.

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II. What Are We To Learn?

A. BE GENEROUS WITH MONEY

"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." (Luke 16:9, NASB95)

1. What is Jesus saying to us?
2. He is telling us to utilize the possessions with which we have been blessed to make eternal friends.
3. Jesus calls these things "the wealth of unrighteousness." Why?
4. It is probably because our pursuit of wealth can make us selfish, and cause us to take advantage of others, ultimately making us unfaithful to God.

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5. Paul warned the evangelist Timothy that "the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (2 Timothy 6:10, NASB95).
6. Solomon, one of the richest kings to ever live, wrote in Proverbs 23:4-5,

"Do not weary yourself to gain wealth,
Cease from your consideration of it.
When you set your eyes on it, it is gone.
For wealth certainly makes itself wings
Like an eagle that flies toward the heavens."

(Proverbs 23:4–5, NASB95)

7. Our worldly wealth will go somewhere — we cannot hang on to it.
8. The only wealth that will endure is that which we have invested in others for the sake of Christ and His gospel.
9. Is your use of wealth bringing you closer to God?
10. Are you using your wealth and possessions to gain eternal friends?

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B. BE FAITHFUL WITH MONEY

“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. “Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? “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?” (Luke 16:10–12, NASB95)

1. If you and I are unfaithful in small things, we will handle large things in the same way.
2. Jesus wants us to know that all of our activities in life matter because they reveal the nature of our character.
3. If you and I are not faithful with our money, what Jesus calls “unrighteous wealth (mammon, NKJV)”, God will not entrust us with “true (spiritual) riches” — the care of souls, missions, evangelism, the oversight of his church.
4. Jesus also tells us that if we cannot be faithful in caring for that which is someone else’s, who will give us responsibility for our own things?
5. If there is no risk to taking care of that which belongs to someone else, why give a person something for which they are fully responsible?
6. To take this one step further, our earthly lives are stewardships given to us by God for which we are responsible.
7. They are preparation for the life to come and will determine how much we will possess in the life to come.

8. Each of us must strive to be faithful now so that we will be given greater responsibility in the life to come.

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C. SERVE GOD, NOT WEALTH

“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.” (Luke 16:13, NASB95)

1. Jesus wants us to know that money is not and cannot be the ultimate priority in our lives.
2. We cannot serve two masters at the same time.
3. There comes a moment when we must choose a priority:
 - a. We love one and devote our energies to it.
 - b. We hate and despise the other.
4. Because we live in a material world, there are times when attention to financial matters is required — i.e., buying a house, purchasing a car, providing for the needs of our families.
5. However, even in these times we must be careful not to become too attached to money and the possessions we have acquired.
6. As Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).
7. The bottom line is that our Father, His kingdom and His righteousness must always be that which we seek first and foremost (Matthew 6:33).

Conclusion

1. Jesus calls each of us to ask ourselves what we are doing with our money?
2. Actually, it is not “our” money it is His which He has loaned to us for the time we live here in this world.

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3. It was Asaph, who, long ago in Psalm 50 wrote these words:

“For every beast of the forest is Mine,
The cattle on a thousand hills . . .
For the world is Mine, and all it contains”
(Psalm 50:10,12b, NASB95)

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4. We often sing the hymn “Remind Me, Dear Lord” which has these words in the first stanza:

**The things that I love and hold dear to my heart
Are just borrowed they're not mine at all.
Jesus only let me use them to brighten my life,
So remind me, remind me, dear Lord.
Dottie Rambo, 1966**

5. You and I owe a great debt to the God we serve, a debt we can never repay.
6. Let us always use what He has given us to serve Him and bring others to Him while we live here.