

Luke 16:1-15

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Preacher: Kenneth Stewart

[0 : 00] Luke chapter 16 and verse 13. No servant can serve two masters.

Either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

And especially the last part of that sentence, sorry, the last part of the verse, the final sentence, you cannot serve both God and money, or God and wealth.

As we saw in our reading, there are two parables really in this chapter. The first is more commonly referred to by its old title as the parable of the unjust steward or the unjust manager.

And the second parable is a better known one, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Now both these parables are actually intimately connected.

[1 : 10] And the thing which connects them is just this theme of money or wealth. And our attitude to that money or wealth.

That's the theme of both parables. The first one was actually specifically addressed to the disciples. The second one was especially addressed to the Pharisees.

And later on we'll see the significance of that. But the key words which govern both parables you'll find here right at the end of verse 13.

This statement, you cannot serve both God and money, helps to explain the first parable, and it helps to explain the second one.

That's what they're both about. And I suppose there's another verse too that helps us to understand both parables. And you find it in verse 9.

[2 : 11] Where Christ says, I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves.

So that when it is gone, or when you are gone, or when you fail, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

So these are the key words that explain both parables. First, you cannot serve both God and money. And then secondly, and more positively, make friends for yourselves with the wealth which God gives you.

Now let's first of all begin with this word, money, or wealth. The passage here speaks about worldly wealth, and it speaks about money. Now it's actually the same word in the original language.

And I'm sure some of you are familiar with that word because the translators just left it as it was. In the old Aramaic, the word was mammon. And so the form of this verse that some of you will be most familiar with is just this.

[3 : 22] You cannot serve both God and mammon. Now that's the word that your Lord used, mammon. It's an old Aramaic word. And it's interesting that he chose that word for money or wealth because the root meaning of that word is simply trust.

Trust. Now I suppose you could ask, why would the Lord take a word meaning trust and use it for wealth or money?

Why should he choose that word here in particular? Well, I think it's not difficult to answer that question. The reason he chooses the word is because trust is what we do very often to wealth.

We put our trust in it. We look to it for security. We build it up and we hope that it will cover us, that it will provide for all kinds of eventualities and possibilities.

And very often the people who don't put their trust in God are putting trust in their resources, in the material wealth which they've amassed. So in other words, it's just a kind of security.

[4 : 40] That's what money really is. That's why so many people are desperate to get it and why so many people are desperate to hold on to it. And that's why too mammon became associated with evil of all kinds.

In fact, in verse 9 here which is translated worldly wealth, the real meaning of the expression is wealth of unrighteousness or mammon of unrighteousness.

I'm not sure why it was translated here worldly wealth exactly, but mammon of unrighteousness just means that very often people use wealth in an unrighteous way.

very often people acquire it in a false kind of way, maybe by extortion or something of that kind. And very often too people use it once they get it in an ungodly way.

I mean, if you've got money in your pocket it might be quite interesting just to trace where it came from, through whose hands it passed, and just to see how many unjust things are connected to it in acquiring it and in using it.

[5 : 46] So it often came to be called mammon of unrighteousness and that's our Lord refers to it too. But here in these two parables and in this whole passage Christ is addressing the question, well then, what should our attitude to it be?

It's there after all, it is wealth, it is money, resources, it is mammon for most people, they trust it, and it's a mammon of unrighteousness, but what now should it be for you, especially my disciples? Now the Pharisees are in the hearing and that's important, we'll see in a moment why. The Pharisees are in the hearing but it's addressed especially to the disciples. And I want you to notice before we go any further that included in this number of disciples are recently converted tax collectors.

They're still in this company. In chapter 15, verse 2 tells us that at this point in this ministry tax collectors and sinners drew near to hear him and many of them heard and many of them were converted.

Now these tax collectors were considered beyond the pale or if you like beyond hope. The Pharisees felt that it was a waste of time to preach to them.

[7 : 02] They felt you shouldn't even bother telling them about a way of salvation because the very fact of what they were as sinners and tax collectors meant that God had rejected them.

That was their belief. They had the hallmarks of God's rejection and a tax collector was someone a Jewish person normally who worked for the Roman authorities gathering taxes from their fellow Jews.

And they used to please their fellow Jews too. And so they were considered immoral and traitors. And so no one should bother with them. But interestingly they felt drawn to the Lord's message and to the Lord's person.

Obviously they felt that when Christ preached the message was for them. And that's an interesting thing you know because Christ never lowered the ethic of his message. Never.

In fact his ethic is more intense than that of the scribes and the Pharisees. But it was obvious in the way in which he proclaimed the truth that he had a genuine desire to see them come into the kingdom too and that's what they responded to.

[8 : 11] And there's an important message for ourselves there as Christians too without a doubt. It's not the content of her message that requires diluting. It's a spiritual sincerity to the people who are on the outside.

That is what they are drawn to. The sense that the message of change is genuinely meaningfully really addressed to them. And that's how the Lord took it and they responded to it.

They responded to it just like that. People like Zacchaeus, you read of him within a couple of chapters, people thought well how could the Lord stay at the house of this man in Jericho?

And Zacchaeus said if I've taken anything by extortion he says I'm paying it fourfold back to them.

That's a sign of repentance and a sign of change. But it's vital for them to understand what are they supposed to do now with their resources.

Many of them very wealthy people. How do we live and what do we do with our money? Well, that's part of what the Lord addresses here. And I suppose what Christ says to them can just be summed up like this, that he wants them now to be prudent with their finances.

[9 : 18] Now, of course there's a certain chancellor who likes to use this word in connection with finance, but it's not the same kind of prudence. It's almost a shrewdness or a cleverness that the Lord wants us to use when it comes to our wealth, to the resources which God has given us.

And he illustrates it by this first parable here of the unjust manager. Now, before we apply it, let's just make sure we understand the facts of the story as Christ gives them, or at least the important ones, the most important ones anyway.

First of all, we have a wealthy man, he's a landowner of some kind, and he's entrusted all he's got to this steward or manager.

Now, the manager here is a steward, and that means that he had a lot of authority. He was the overseer of the landowner's resources.

It was that responsible. Same kind of position that Eliezer had in Abraham's house, or Joseph in Potiphar's house. He was over all the business.

[10:30] Now, an accusation was made against the steward that he had somehow wasted his master's goods. He had misappropriated it. It had been somehow. Something shady was going on, and the master summoned the steward into his presence, and he told him to give a final statement account.

Now, notice, this isn't with a view to investigating them. It's actually an open or shelf case. There's going to be no examination. The master knows already that the steward is guilty.

He just wants to see the picture properly of himself. In fact, he tells him quite explicitly in verse 2, give an account of your management because you cannot be a manager any longer.

And there's no indication that the man was falsely accused. In fact, he seems to quite accept that the accusation is right. He doesn't attempt to defend himself in that kind of way.

He doesn't protest that there's an injustice. He just accepts it, and he decides to get on with it. But get on with what? Because he's got a problem.

[11:41] He's finished, and he hasn't got a clue what to do. He rejects two options. You'll notice that, first of all, manual labor. He's probably never done it, or never done much of it.

And he says, he cannot do it, he cannot dig. And he says, I am ashamed to beg. He's not going to go onto the streets either to beg his money, just because his pride won't allow him. He's probably been a big man, he's quite influential, and there's no way he's going to beg on the streets.

So what is he going to do? Well, we have to credit his quick thinking. What he does is just he decides this, that if he does his creditors some kind of favor, they'll do him one.

He scratches their backs, in other words, than they'll scratch his. And what he decides to do is just to call them one by one into his presence. He takes the wax tablets and changes the amounts that they actually owed, and he strikes a financial deal with them all, which leaves them very happy.

And the result of that, as he puts it himself in verse 4, is this. He says, I'll know what I'll do so that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.

[13:00] Notice, that's what he wants to do. He wants to provide some kind of security for himself. I'm out of here, he says, and finished. But if I help these people, then they're going to help me.

And so they do. They know he's done a good third, and they'll give him some kind of employment, or some kind of position, something that takes away the necessity.

Now, what he did was so audacious, that even his own master commended him for it. Now, it may seem strange to us that the master would actually commend this kind of shady dealing with his own estate.

I suppose it's similar to someone who suffered something. Perhaps a burglary of some kind, and was yet able to really admire the way in which the person had actually got in.

I'm not so sure he would have been so admiring if he had lost his whole estate. But he couldn't help but marvel at how quick-thinking the man was, and how he provided for himself, and took care of himself.

[14:01] That's the point. That's the only point. He commended him because of how shrewdly he had dealt in a difficult situation. Now, it seems very strange to us that the Lord would take this kind of thing and make it somehow an example to us.

But he does, in a strange way. There's a couple of things that need to be said. First of all, the Lord isn't commending this man's trickery.

All he's commending is his foresight. He sees a situation coming, and he prepares for it.

That's all. He sees the problem. He sees it plainly, and he works out what he should do in order to look after himself. That's the point.

Not it's trickery, but it's foresight and it's preparation. And you'll notice too that Christ is comparing behavior in two different spheres.

[15:10] That's what makes the parable work. On the one hand, he's taking the behavior of the world in its own sphere, and then he takes the behavior of the Christian in his or her own sphere.

And he says, well, what this man is there, let that somehow be analogous to what you are here as a Christian. Or as he puts it himself in verse 8, the master, now that's the master of the parable, it's not Christ, the master commended the dishonest manager just because he had acted shrewdly. And then, Christ speaks. I know it's not easy to see that transition here, but it's important to understand it. As we through verse 8, Christ is the speaker directly, in other words.

For, Christ says, the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.

Or the people of this world are more shrewd in their own generation, literally, than are the people of the light. Now, what does that mean?

[16:24] Well, what it means is this, that the children of this world act consistently. They act consistently, just in this respect, that they are of this world, and they don't consider the next.

In other words, they have no thought of the next. They live for the present, for the here, and for the now. So, it's understandable that their foresight extends to what's round the corner in this world, and they make provision for it, and they make plan.

And you can't scuple them, neither can I, if they don't consider everything absolutely morally, as we would consider it. Why not? Because very often they have no world of God at all. They have no conception of a judgment seat, no conception of accountability to our being higher than themselves. They have a little conception of themselves as rational, or as treaters before a creator. And so, it's just a matter of the next meal, the next day, the next holiday, the pension, and so on.

That's what matters. And so, they become supremely wise in negotiating all these things. And they don't scuple if they stand on someone's toes along the way.

[17:36] Why should they? I mean, there's nothing particularly important attached to it. Perhaps the highest their morality goes is this. Well, if I do them a good turn, they might do me or not, maybe as high as it goes.

Nothing else. It doesn't really matter if you stand on anyone's toes. And of course, just as a digression, that's the problem with contemporary immorality anyway. Isn't it? That's always going to be the problem with contemporary immorality.

When you do away with God, there just simply is no reason why you should be moral. If it's inconvenient for you. Why should you? What is anyone's life?

It's not important. As a science lecturer was forced to concede recently to a Christian student, there is no difference whatsoever in value between a frog and a person.

Well, there you are. That's your morality. Why shouldn't you deal with people as you deal with frogs? If we're all specks of dust, and if the whole cosmos is just a random movement of gases, chemicals, atoms, atoms, what's morality?

[18:46] What's morality? These people are living consistent to their principles. They're just looking after themselves because they're creatures of this world.

And just to continue that digression, of course, what we're seeing is that gradually working itself out in the contemporary Western world, isn't it? We're seeing that. C.S.

Lewis said a long time ago that Christian morality hangs around for a while after the doctrine has gone. Like the grin of the Cheshire cat, he says in Alice in Wonderland, the grin is in the air that the cat's gone.

Eventually, the grin disappears too. That's Christian morality. We're seeing it gradually erode because the truth lying underneath it has gone. The knowledge of God, of accountability, these things have gone, and the fabric begins to unravel.

But anyway, the children of this world, they're shrewd in their own generation and in their own lifetime because that's as far as their plans go. Then he says the believers are the children of the light.

[19:54] Well, they're different. They're not children of this world. They're called children of light. In other words, they know of God.

And they know of eternity. And they know of judgment. And they know about which we shall be judged. They know that key. I think it's nice to respond, isn't it?

Well, it may recover. I just hope you can hear me. I haven't got the strongest of voices, I'm afraid, so I'll just carry on and hope for the best. But these people are children of light.

They don't belong to this world. They are not of it. And so they plan and prepare in a different way. You can see beyond this world and you can see into the world that is yet to come.

And all your decisions, even with respect to wealth, with respect to morality and righteousness and everything, is made in the light of the world that is yet to come.

[21 : 06] There's that to think about. There's the God before whom I must stand, the Christ who sits on the judgment seat with his eyes like a flame of fire and his hair as white as wool and a two-edged sword.

I, you, must stand there before me and give an account. So we have different principles, and different we are there, and we make different choices, but the Lord says sometimes, it can't run consistently.

There are some things that claim to be the children of life, that will act like the children of darkness, and I suppose, in some instances, it will only be an eternity itself, that will reveal what kind of people they were.

after all, the way he puts it in verse 8, at the end of verse 8, is this, he says, the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.

of the Pharisees there. We're told in verse 14 that they loved money, and they heard all this, and they were sneering at Christ.

[22 : 22] Now, they believed themselves to have a light, and they believed to be the people of the light. And here, we're told the truth about it, and they loved money. In other words, they were idolaters.

We're told in the Bible that covetousness is idolatry. There they were. I mean, the last sin you could have put to them, or laid at their door, would be idolaters. But yet, you could.

It was true. They loved it. They were lovers of money. And they felt that the Lord was probably getting at them. Here, I'm sure he was.

He was beginning to move already in his address, away from the disciples, and on to the Pharisees. And the Lord is saying, well, if we live in the light, let us walk in it.

If we really are children of light, let us live like that, with respect to resources. Well, then what does that mean? How do we use wealth? Well, let me put it like this for you.

[23 : 19] Now, this is important, so I'll say it twice, especially with the microphone on. We should be as clever in using wealth to promote our welfare in the world to come as worldly people are in promoting their welfare here.

Now, let's hear it again and think about it. We should be as clever in using wealth to promote our welfare in the world to come as worldly people are in promoting their welfare here.

Now, what does that mean then? Well, the first thing it means is that we remember this above all things, that you and I will be called one day to give an account of our own stewardship too.

We be called to give an account of it. We can't buy our way into heaven, we know that. But what we do with our resources matters, and it matters in terms of entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

We've got to give an account of our stewardship, because that's what we are. We are stewards. We speak of property, and property is fair enough in a civil society, it's inclined in God's word, property, yes.

[24 : 55] But in the last analysis, you tell me what you own. Tell me what is yours. Tell me what your property is. Nothing. I have nothing either. I own nothing.

My clothes, the home, the possessions, they're gods. Just as the cattle on a thousand hills are gods, so is everything you've got gods.

And he makes you a steward of it for a time. That's what you are. To use it properly, and carefully, and biblically, and spiritually.

And we will be given, called to give an account to God for what we have done with it all. Our time, our energy, our resources.

And if the devil was to charge us at the judgment seat and say, hey, look at this person. I've got a charge to make against this person that he has squandered your resources, what would our defense be?

[25 : 55] What would it be? Would we expect to have one? Now, I know it's all very well to say on these instances, well, I'm only looking to Christ. Well, fair enough, I hope we are all looking to Christ. But are we looking to Christ?

Does the kind of looking to Christ we have involve something that has changed our lives and given it a new dynamic? That is not what the passage is all about. How have we got something to say in terms of our stewardship?

Well, the Lord says, let three things be true of you and let it be true of me too. Three things. First of all, don't serve wealth.

Don't serve it. Don't let it be your master because he says in verse 13, no servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be at least devoted to the one and despise the other.

And then he puts it categorically, we cannot serve both God and money. And it's possible to make it your God. It's possible for wealth and materialism to have the first place in your life.

[27 : 10] But Christ says you can't be involved really like that in the pursuit of both. Your life can't revolve around both. You cannot worship at both altars.

You must either consecrate yourself to the Lord and all that you are, or else you consecrate yourself to the altar of mammon. And that's why we've got to watch materialism.

Watch it all the time. And sometimes you can recognize its fruit, which is consumerism. We've just got to watch it. That's all.

Let me say two things, though, in connection with that. First of all, a lot of Christ's warnings against covetousness are addressed to the poor. Now, that's remarkable because you would think on all occasions that there would be warnings addressed to the rich, but you check it out.

And in most cases they are addressed to the poor. In fact, specifically addressed to his own disciples. And he warns them against simple over-anxiety in connection with what to eat and what to drink and what to wear.

[28 : 20] As though being over-anxious about these things can produce a habit of mind which just dwells in them and makes them all important.

The poor man can be covetous. That can underlie many political philosophies and social philosophies. That people want something which someone else has.

Covetousness in the heart of the people who don't have. The poor can be covetous. So don't always think it's the rich. You may be here and you're fairly poor and you think, well, I can't be guilty of covetousness.

Well, not so, according to the Lord. The other thing is this. Letters. For any favor, all of us, let's take care with respect to what message we transmit to our children in this whole area.

Because our children don't primarily listen to what we say, they observe what we do. They observe what we do. And it's easy for us very subtly to give the message that it's really possessions that matter most, that it's money that matters most.

[29 : 37] We can transmit that message and they'll take it all, right? They'll get the sense that, oh, something's not quite what it seems to be in this house.

There's a lot of talk about God being very, very important, but at the end of the day it seems to be the job I'll get. It seems to be the income I have, or the car that I have, or the clothes that I have, and that my parents have, which is much more important.

Let's watch our messages. Let's see, let them see us making choices that put God's kingdom first, so that they learn right priorities in their own lives.

Nothing almost happened to you by accident. This is the message you pass on unawares to yourself. So do not serve mammon.

Let it serve you. And the picture of God, don't you be a servant or a slave to it. The second thing he says is make friends with it.

[30 : 44] Verse 9. I tell you, he says, use worldly wealth, or the mammon of unrighteousness, to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be well, you will be well, you will be well, you will be well.

When you fail means when you die, as we'll see in a moment, to gain friends for yourselves, so that when you fail or when you die, you will be well, you already are, where they have gone.

Remember the unjust steward? He made friends in this world so that once he lost his job, he would have people who said, come in here with us, and we look after you.

Well, here the same thing is true except this time it's a higher realm, it's a spiritual realm. The people in the homes are in eternal homes, we're told. They're in heaven, and they're going to welcome you into heaven because of what you did for them when they were in need in this world. You don't have to go far for an example of this. The parable at the end of the chapter is an example. Lazarus and the rich man. We're told that when Lazarus died, the poor beggar, we're told that he went into Abraham's bosom.

[32 : 19] He was received there by that man of God. When the rich man died afterwards, we're told that he was buried, and he wasn't received by anybody.

He began a lonely, lonely existence. We're told that he lived in and he lifted up his eyes in hell. But the stark fact is that if he had considered the world to come properly, Lazarus would have welcomed them into the eternal dwelling place where they both would have been.

And Lazarus could have said, this is the man who helped me. This is the man who had a Christian heart, a Christian life, and a Christian doctrine.

and he helped me when I lay at his door. And I was a beggar and I had nothing. He helped me welcome him into heaven, and he would have been welcomed into heaven. I'm quite sure that you do good to the Lord's people, but that will be acknowledged even by them in heaven.

Would you not like to meet people who prayed over you? Perhaps you've never met them. Would you not like to meet them in heaven? Of course you will. Of course you want to, and of course you will. And that will be part of your praise, and part of your rejoicing in one another.

[33 : 36] But that's not what the rich man got. He lifted up his eyes unwelcomed, and he was in hell. But the message here, surely, is that we're to make friends for ourselves amongst the people of God.

And that's the first thing. Let's remember that this especially refers to how we deal with God's people. There are passages in the word that make plain that the way we deal with God's people is of paramount importance.

Even that famous passage in Matthew 25 where Christ says, I was naked and you clothed me, I was in prison and you visited me, I was hungry and you fed me.

And the people said, when did we do these things? He says, in as much as you did them to the least of these, my brethren, he says, you did it unto me.

It's the church, how we responded to the church, and how we found out the people in need, and how we helped God's people in need. That is what is of paramount importance.

[34 : 50] Now, the poor everywhere are important, but God's people poor are of special importance. That's what gave such significance to Lazarus, as we'll see God willing tonight, lying at the door of the rich man.

How we deal with the people of God is so important. Now, it doesn't mean that you have to impoverish yourself to help the poor. It doesn't mean that.

God never requires us to impoverish ourselves. God doesn't say that it's wrong to be wealthy, but he does say that you should alleviate need, not to make someone as comfortable as yourself, necessarily, but in Deuteronomy we're told quite plainly to alleviate need, real need, and especially as God places it at your door.

At your door. Now, I know that raises all kinds of questions about a global village, but let me just take the obvious, leave it at the obvious. Sometimes God puts people, his own people, especially into situations in which you can help.

And that was, of course, what was so supremely and startfully true about Lazarus. He was at the rich man's door. There he is. New providence. It's up to you to help this man there.

[36 : 16] And when God does that to us and he puts somebody in no situation in providence, especially his own child, and there's a need which we can have, we are required to help that need.

Because you're making a friend with it. Someone who will welcome you one day into heaven. God's poor whom you have helped. Don't serve wealth.

Rather, make friends with it amongst God's people. And, last of all, be trustworthy with it. Be trustworthy with it. And, again, just very briefly, two things in connection with that.

Very briefly. First of all, your handling of wealth actually reveals your character. Reveals your character.

Verse 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.

[37 : 25] If our dealing with money, money, and that's maybe his business world, but this is the real man here. No. That's the real man there.

It's an old story I remember reading about some Robert Louis Dabney, an American theologian. He was once dealing with this idea of people who had compartments in their lives.

And they could be quite unscrupulous in one area, but very scrupulous in another. As the Bible says, like a cake, not turned, half turned, half cooked. He says there was an old story about a

bishop who was also a feudal chief of some kind.

And this bishop, he was very diligent in all his duties, you know, but when it came to his civil position as a baron or whatever it was, he was guilty of all kinds of fraud, of extortion, and he would use his power to manipulate people in all kinds of ways.

And he was challenged about this and said, well, that's what I do as a baron. I don't do that as a bishop. And the question was put to him, well, when the baron is in hell, where do you expect a bishop to be?

[38 : 41] Well, of course, that's the question. That's the question. We just cannot divide ourselves up. We cannot say, oh, well, my business part here can be quantum scrupulous for the rest of the time in a different person.

That's what we are. Our Lord says, if we are unjust in what is little, we are unjust in what is much. If we are not proper in our dealings with our worldly wealth, then we are not proper full stop. That's the first thing. It reveals our character. And then it reveals our destiny too. Thank you.