

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key verse: Luke 16:1-15

GIVING YOUR TREASURE

A man took his seat in the theater, but he was too far from the stage. He whispered to the usher, "This play is a mystery, and I like this type of play so much I want to watch it up close so I can catch all of the dialogue. If you'll get me a better seat I'll give you a handsome tip."

So, the usher moved him into the second row, and the man quietly handed him a quarter. The usher looked at his tip for a second... and then leaned over and whispered in the man's ear: "The wife did it."

There's something about that joke that makes us say: "He got what he deserved." The theater-goer must be so shrewd in giving only a meager tip but the usher was shrewder in a very clever way. Shrewdness characterize many people's behavior in this world. We live in a world that often understands and appreciates shrewdness and cunning in others. In fact, many movies and plays have clever plot twists where their heroes or heroines do some shrewd thing to thwart evil – and the audience applauds. Shrewdness is considered a valuable skill.

But here in Luke 16 we have a parable where Jesus tells us about a shrewd manager... and something inside of us seems to rebel. How can we be enthralled by a cunning,

dishonest manager who basically rips off his employer AND THEN (as Jesus tells us) ends up being commended for his actions?

Well, let us look at this Parable of the Shrewd Manager in Luke 16:1-15. We are on the second part of our 4-part series on the Parables of Jesus about giving. And so, we're calling this series "Giving Like Jesus." Today, we'll talk about "Giving Your Treasure." (Read Luke 16:1-15)

The "moral of the story" is found in the last sentence and it's the key to understanding the parable. The manager was a cunning, conniving, dishonest rascal—but you can't help but smile at how shrewd he was.

When he learned he was about to lose his job, he decided to cover his own assets. He went to some customers and gave them deep discounts on what they owed his boss. Why?

Obviously, after he was kicked out of his company for mismanagement, he would go to one of those customers who "owed him a favor" and hopefully they would remember his action and give him a job. When it came time to be fired, even his boss said, "You may be dishonest but I admire your shrewdness. I'm impressed!"

That's how business is still done. You hear expressions like, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. Tit for tat." Now, Jesus isn't suggesting we use dishonest business practices, but He is suggesting we can learn something from the clever way cunning people operate.

First, notice Jesus recognized there are only two kinds of people. He divides the entire human race into these two groups. Some are what He called, “people of this world” and the others are what He called “people of the light.” Which group are you in? People who do not have a personal relationship with God are “of this world.” This present world is not all there is—there is another world. This world is temporary, and the other world is eternal. This world is physical, and the other world is spiritual. Millions of people live their lives as if this world was all there will ever be. They devote their entire lives to getting ahead in this world and accumulating all the toys that will make them feel comfortable. On the other hand, those of us who are “people of the light” have a personal relationship with the God of the Universe. The Bible says, *“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”* (I John 1:5) We are living in this world, but we know this world is not all there is. We will never feel totally comfortable in this world because it’s not really our home. Like Abraham, we are looking for a city not made with human hands.

In spite of this, Jesus said we should learn to be a little shrewder in the ways of the world without becoming like the world. Sadly, Christians are some of the most gullible, naïve folks around. There are stories about how some trusting Christians were bamboozled by a scam where they gave away their life’s savings in some “sure-fire investment.” When it turns out to be a scam, they say, “Why, he seemed to be such a fine Christian that I trusted him.”

Gullible Christians are the ones who have passed around via email the old false rumor about how an atheist, Madalyn Murray O’Hair, has a bill before Congress that will outlaw all religious broadcasting. Before email, there was snail mail and Christians have spent more than 20 twenty years and thousands of dollars of worth of paper and

postage to write letters to the Federal Communications Commission and Congress to protest something that was always a rumor.

Come on, Children of the Light, wake up! The reason we all need a little dose of worldly wisdom is because we have to live and operate in a world filled with dishonest, crooked people. If you aren't shrewd, you'll be eaten like a lamb in a pack of wolves. That's what Jesus meant when He said, *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."* (Matthew 16:10) Note the distinction. The crooked manager in the parable was as shrewd as a snake, but he was as guilty as sin. What can we learn from the Crooked Manager? He knew he was facing a deadline; he formulated a plan, and he acted before the opportunity was gone. We are also facing a deadline. Do you have a creative plan to influence your world before that deadline? Are you letting opportunities pass by? We must learn to be wise in the ways of the world, but we must remain as innocent as doves. But that's hard. In fact, like every other command in the Christian life, it's impossible without the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. That's the parable and the "moral" to the story, but Jesus is just getting started.

Jesus used this unusual parable about a crooked man to launch into four practical principles about handling money. We know these teachings are about money because of the reaction of the Pharisees. Look down to verse 14: *"The Pharisees who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus."*

As many of us know, money per se is not evil. Money is not immoral—it is amoral—morally neutral. It's what you do with money that determines its moral value. Money can be used to build a facility like this, or to feed the hungry, or to educate people, or to take the gospel around the world. Or money can be used to buy drugs, create

pornography, or to pay someone to kill another person. The Bible never says money is evil—it is the love of money, the craving for money that is a problem. We read in I Timothy 6:9-10, *“Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”* Isn’t that true? We all know folks who have no time for God because they are busy making the almighty dollar or spending it.

So, let me now give you some principles about handling money that come from the lips Jesus:

1. Your best investment is in people. (vs. 9)

How have your investments been doing lately? I have a hot tip to share with you about a great investment. It’s some inside information from the Creator of Heaven and Earth. This investment advice is found in verse 9: *“I tell you use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”*

If you have a King James Version it says something about making friends with the “mammon of unrighteousness.” “Mammon” was the name of the ancient Canaanite god of riches.

Jesus is saying we need to be clever in using our money so the end result will be seeing people in heaven. You can’t buy your salvation or anyone else’s salvation, and you can’t buy true friends. But notice how the crooked manager used his discounts to influence his customers so they would receive him favorably after he lost his job. In the same way, we should be using our money to influence people for Christ.

Obviously the best way to do that is when you give your money for missions and evangelism. And I'm so glad many of us here are making this investment. Every year we send our missions team to the Philippines and every year, many folks here in the church contribute to their expenses. Jesus said one day your money will be gone, and you'll be gone from your money. So while you have an opportunity, use your money to influence people so when you are living in the eternal dwellings or heaven there will be friends there to welcome you. I'll come back to this verse at the end of the message.

The second principle about handling money is

2. Manage God's money well and he'll trust you with more.

The next financial principle is expressed in verses 10-12. Jesus says, *"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. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"*

Jesus mentions two kinds of wealth. First, there is "worldly wealth." That's the money God gives each of us. You must remember all the wealth in the world belongs to God. He owns all the diamonds, all the gold, and all the oil wells.

In Psalm 50:10-11, God says, *"every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the insects in the fields are mine."* God has full ownership of everything we have. In fact, everything in this universe.

Now, God gives us wealth so we can buy the basics to meet our needs. We use money to buy food, clothing and shelter. Also, He gives us wealth so we can enjoy things that go beyond the basic necessities. This is bonus wealth. God has promised He will meet our needs—but He never promised to meet our wants.

When I speak of a “wealthy person” who do you envision? You probably think of some billionaire like Bill Gates, or at least a millionaire, but you don’t think of yourself as wealthy. If you have money in your pocket to buy lunch, and you have an indoor toilet and your drove your own car to church, you are wealthier than 80% of the world’s population. That’s worldly wealth—but it came from God.

Now, wealth is a necessity but God uses it to test us. He wants to see how well we manage that kind of wealth. Look again at verse 11 of Luke 12. Jesus speaks of another kind of wealth. He calls it “true riches.” If you are trustworthy with a little, God knows you can be trusted with a lot. If you prove to be trustworthy with worldly wealth, God can trust you with true riches. True riches have nothing to do with money. They include spiritual blessings like peace, security, and strength that are so valuable they can’t be bought at any price.

Are you managing God’s money wisely? I guess the real question is: Are you returning a tithe of it to the Lord? It all belongs to the Lord, but He requires we give Him back 10% to demonstrate we trust Him. Sometimes people say, “If I was making a million a year, I’d be happy to give God 10% of it.” Well, if you aren’t tithing on your \$30,000, what makes you think God will trust you with a million dollars?

It reminds me of a story about Peter Marshall who was the chaplain of the United States Senate for many years. He tells the story about a man who came to him and

said that he was struggling to tithe even though he had a large income. The man said to Marshall, “I have a problem. I used to tithe regularly some years ago, but... but now. Well I use to tithe when I made \$20,000 a year and I gave \$2000 and I could do that. But last year I made \$500,000 and there is just no way I can afford to give about \$50,000.

And Marshall thought for a moment and he said, “You have a serious problem. How about we pray about that.” And the guy said, “That would be great. “ And so Marshall wrapped his arm around him and bowed his head and prayed, “Lord you know this man has a serious problem right now. And I pray that you would help him with that. I pray that you would take his income back down to the level that he can afford to tithe.”

It’s not about tithing; it’s about trusting. Do you believe God can be trusted when He speaks in Malachi 3:10? He says, *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”*

Now, if you think God is a liar, don’t trust Him with a tithe. Or if you don’t think He has the ability to do what He says He’ll do—don’t trust Him with a tithe. But if you think God is trustworthy, go ahead and start trusting Him by returning 10% of your income to Him.

The problem is too many of God’s people are “tippers” instead of tithers. I think the best thing the U.S. government could do to help our church would be to quit printing \$1 bills! Are you just tipping God? It’s okay to tip God if you tip the amount you are supposed to tip at a restaurant—15%. But most religious tippers give God a dollar here and a dollar there.

Another problem is many Christians give God their “leftovers” instead of their “firstfruits.” You pay all your other bills and if you have anything left over, you give some of it to God. God can’t have first place in your life if you are giving Him last place in your checkbook!

The real issue is not whether God is trustworthy—it’s whether or not we are trustworthy in managing God’s money. Can God trust you with more than you are managing right now?

3. Money is a great servant but a terrible master.

Jesus shares a great financial principle in verse 13. And contrary to what some men say, this is not a verse about bigamy or having two wives! He says, *“No servant can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.”*

Again, it’s that word “Mammon”, the pagan god of riches. In America, some people have made money their god as well. Six or seven days a week they worship at the altar of the almighty dollar. Professor Howard Hendrix relates the story of visiting in the home of a wealthy Christian man from a blueblood family in Boston. He was impressed with the man’s humility and down-to-earth attitude. Dr. Hendrix asked him how he could grow up in such wealth and not be consumed by materialism. The man replied, “My father taught us that everything in our home was either a tool or an idol. The choice was ours.”

Some of you may know comedian Jack Benny. He was known as a skinflint who hated to spend his money. In the old comedy routine, Jack Benny was accosted by a robber.

The mugger pointed a gun at Jack and said, “Come on, hand it over. Your money or your life!” Jack rubbed his chin and said, “I’m thinking, I’m thinking!”

In the same way God is saying to each of us today, “Worship and serve Me or Money—which will it be.” And we rub our chin and say, “I’m thinking. I’m thinking!”

How important is money to you? Several years ago, people were asked what they would be willing to do for \$10 million. The results were tabulated in a book entitled *The Day America Told the Truth*. 25% said they would totally abandon their family. 23% said they would become a prostitute for a week. 16% indicated they would leave their spouse. 3% said they would put their children up for adoption. Hey folks, it’s only money.

Now, let’s back up and see what Jesus is saying. In verse 9 Jesus says one day money will be gone, and it will. When you die, worldly riches will cease to exist for you. We bring nothing into this world, and we take nothing out with us. You’ve never seen a U-Haul in a funeral procession.

You see, the thing about money is that “You can’t take it with you...but you can send it on ahead.” Jesus spoke about laying up treasures in heaven. Jesus said we should invest our money in people because people have eternal souls and can go to heaven. In I Timothy 6:17-19 God says, *“Tell those rich in this world’s wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage—to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they’ll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life.”* (The Message)

Look again at verse 9. Are you investing your money in ways so that when you get to heaven there will be people there to greet you because of your gifts? Will there be some people there because of how you lived, what you said, and how you gave your money? When you are giving to God, you may not even realize how far your money is reaching with the good news.

I love the song by Ray Boltz entitled “Thank You.” It starts out with him having a dream of being in heaven, and you are standing beside him. As you are standing there in heaven someone calls your name. Someone walks up to you and says, “Friend, you may not know me,” then he said, “but wait—you used to teach my Sunday School when I was only eight. Every week you would say a prayer, before the class would start. One day when you said that prayer, I asked Jesus in my heart.” Then in the second verse Ray sings, “Then another man stood before you; He said, ‘Remember the time? A missionary came to church, His pictures made you cry. You didn’t have much money—But you gave it anyway. Jesus took that gift you gave, And that’s why I’m in heaven today!’ Thank you for giving to the Lord. For I am a life that was changed. Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am so glad you gave.”

I encourage you to manage God’s resources in a way so when you arrive in heaven, there will be people there who will say, “Thank you for giving to the Lord.”

Let us pray....