

WHAT HAVE YOU CHOSEN?

Luke 16:1-13 Text vs. *13 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”*

The economic situation in our country is terrible. We’re struggling. Companies, airlines, businesses, hotels, restaurants, families. All are stressed. And it’s been a rough year. The stock market just completed one of its worst weeks in months. The Dow Jones, Standard & Poor and Nasdaq had their fourth losing week in the last five. Just this last Tuesday, the Dow had its worst day since June 2020 due to inflation. The same day, the S&P 500 lost more than 4% after a brief bear market rally in August. Tech-heavy Nasdaq was down more than 10%. Financially, our country has slowed down. Investors are concerned this could be the beginning of a market crash like the one in 1929, considered the worst economic event in world history. But the stock market has an incredible track record of recovering, even from the worst crashes. People think about their money and where they spend it.

In our lesson today, Jesus was with his disciples and told them this parable about a man who made his living managing a rich man’s finances as his chief financial officer. Today, they’re called Money Managers. Or Investment Managers. Apparently, this man wasn’t doing a very good job. So, the rich man called him in and said he was going to let him go. Basically, he was giving him two-weeks’ notice. *“What am I going to do? I’m too weak to dig ditches. I’m ashamed to beg”* the man said to himself. Then, he came up with a plan. However, he needed some friends to do it. If he would give them something, then they would owe him! So, he called all the people in who owed the rich man money and asked them, *“What do you owe?”* *“Eight hundred gallons of olive oil.”* He probably said, *“That’s a lot of money, so let’s cut it in half. Make it 400.”* Then he moved to the second man and asked, *“What do you owe?”* *“A thousand bushels of wheat.”* *“Let’s make it 800.”* He continued on reducing everyone’s debt, so that after he was fired, he wouldn’t be left out on the streets. These people would see he’s out of a job and would welcome him into their homes. Smart! Not honest. But smart!

So, what’s the point of Jesus’ parable? There’s a time coming when God’s going to take all your money away from you. Yes, you! Every last penny! It happens when you die! And Jesus said, be like that money manager. *“Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”* He’s not saying you’re to be dishonest. He’s saying, use your worldly wealth wisely. Gain eternal friends, now, so they will welcome you into their eternal dwellings at the end of your time here on Earth. Gain eternal friends. Use your money to help an unbeliever find Christ, so when you do, you’ve made an eternal friend. Use your money to help others in need. Then someday, they’ll thank you. When? When you enter eternal life to be with them forever. Give, to gain eternal friends!

R. G. LeTourneau died in 1969. He was a Christian industrialist who dedicated his entire life to “being a businessman for God.” And he was enormously successful at it. He designed and developed his own line of earth-moving equipment. During World War II his company provided 70% of the Allies’ earthmoving equipment. He spent the early 1950’s perfecting a diesel-electric drivetrain for multi-wheeled heavy-duty-machinery. You’ve probably seen them scooping and moving dirt and rocks building roads and interstates. In 1954, he built the first jack-up oil rigs used out here in the Gulf of Mexico and out in the deep oceans. In 1955, he made the first log-stacker machine for hauling forest products. In 1965, the company made the first straddle freight carrier for loading ships. You’ve seen them moving over huge containers being loaded and unloaded onto ships. In his lifetime he had 300 inventions and hundreds of patents. And as he succeeded financially, he increased his giving to the point where he was giving 90% of all his income to the Lord’s work. He once said, *I shovel out the money, and God shovels it back. But God has a bigger shovel.*

Now, you may be thinking you could give 90% too if you were a multi-millionaire. Maybe so, but LeTourneau didn’t start out wealthy. He *became* wealthy! And what this lesson is teaching is, whatever percentage of your income you currently are giving to the church, make it your lifelong plan to “bump it up.” Give more with every opportunity you have. It doesn’t matter how much you have. Jesus said, use what you have to glorify God. Then He added, *“Whoever can be trusted with very little, can be trusted with much. And whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”*

A preacher noticed a family standing in front of him at a New Orleans convenience store. They didn’t have enough money to pay for the few items they had put in their basket. He tapped the man on the shoulder in front of him at the checkout and said, *“Don’t turn around! But please, accept this money.”* The man opened his hand and took the money without ever seeing the preacher. Nine years later that same preacher was speaking at a church in New Orleans. After the service, a man walked up to him and told him about how he had come to faith in Christ. He said, *“Several years ago, my wife, and our child, were destitute. We had lost everything. No jobs. No money. We were living in our car. We had lost all hope and had agreed to a suicide pact that included our child. However, we decided to first give our son some food. So, we drove to a convenience store to buy him some last food and milk. And while we were there standing in line at that store, we realized we didn’t have enough money to pay for those items. Then, a man behind us asked us to please take the money from*

his hand and not turn around and look at him. Then the man told us, 'Jesus loves you.'” “We left the store. Drove to our designated suicide site. Wept for hours. We couldn't go through with it. So, we drove away. And as we drove, we noticed a church with a sign out front which said, 'Jesus loves you.' We went to that church the very next Sunday. Both my wife, and I, were saved that day!” Then he told the pastor, “When you began speaking this morning I knew immediately, you were the man who gave us that money!” (Now, you may wonder just how did he know that? Well, the pastor was from South Africa and had a very distinct accent.) The man continued, “Your act of kindness was much more than a simple good deed. Three people are alive today, because of it.”

Jesus said, “*be trustworthy with whatever you have.*” Use it to gain eternal friends. If you do, they will welcome you into their heavenly home after you die. As a Christian, spend a few moments thinking about how you spend your money. Ask yourself, *am I worshiping money?* Ask yourself, *am I different in the way I use my money? Different from an unbeliever?* Ask yourself, *What's the purpose of my money?*

Yes, we as a church have a very active and responsible weekly Community Food Distribution program. We reach over 115 homes every week feeding an average of over 246 persons. Our church has an Endowment Fund to help members of our church in financial need. Our Missions Program reaches around the world from our troops overseas, to mission work in Haiti, to children in an afterschool program in Mexico. We help the Shelter for Abused Women and Children. We have a video ministry that reaches between 400 and 500 homes every week, everywhere. Yes, we are doing a great job, *together!* But what's your role in all of this? You as an *individual?* It's wonderful if you're giving money to our missions. It's wonderful if you are giving your time in the food distribution program.

But here's the key to interpreting this parable of Jesus. When the rich man applauded the dishonest money manager for acting wisely in gaining friends before he was fired, it was a good piece of advice. The man changed his behavior. He got ready for his new life. And that's what you must do when you see what you are doing in this life? Get ready for your new life! How do you change to live wisely? Do you need to do to change your attitude? Stewardship may be the answer.

In Jesus' day, how you handled your money was a good indication of how you regarded God. The money manager owned nothing of what he managed. Neither do you own anything! And like that money manager, you are entrusted with your Master's worldly goods. It's God's world! He provides everything for your life. You're given freedom to do with it as you wish. You can develop what potential there is with your wealth. You can use your talents, resources, opportunities, and education, including your money however you want. Or you can squander it. You can spend it on yourself.

But no matter how free you may feel in doing that, there's going to come a day of reckoning when God calls you to His Home. Your own books are going to be audited. You will have to account for every penny you spent, squandered, or invested. Every minute of time you've lived. How well, and how wisely you used that which was entrusted to you by God. God is like that rich man in the parable. He gives you enough time to account for how you have used and what he has provided you with. Then, you're on your own! You can use what you have to help others, like the preacher in that story. Or how LeTourneau did it. Or you can use it on yourself. What have you chosen? The decision is yours.

Have you been faithful with what really belongs to God? No one owns anything in this life because God owns everything! You're just a steward who must give an account of how you used what God has entrusted you with. But you might say, “... *I don't know anyone who owes God 800 gallons of oil. Or 1000 bushels of wheat! What can I do to insure my future?*” Jesus said you must act shrewdly. You must be wise. You must be faithful! Use what belongs to God to benefit others. Use what He has given you to help others. And in doing that, you will be welcomed into eternal life. And that's the “bottom line.” AMEN