

Luke 16:1-15
(Malachi 3:6-12; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)
“You Cannot Serve Two Masters”

Introduction

Jesus spoke more about money than he did about anything else. It is clear in reading the Scriptures that our attitude toward money and our use of money are prime indicators of our spiritual state. Why? In *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller states the problem in these words:

Jesus warns people far more often about greed than about sex, yet almost no one thinks they are guilty of it. Therefore we should all begin with a working hypothesis that “this could easily be a problem for me.” If greed hides itself so deeply, no one should be confident that it is not a problem for them.

The Bible depicts money as having both a dark and a light side. When we trust money and the things that money buys to make us secure and happy, money becomes an idol, and the Bible describes it as “unrighteous,” that is, as separating us from the life and purposes of God. However, when money is seen as a resource for accomplishing God’s purposes on earth, it becomes a useful and crucial aspect of our stewardship. In his book, *Money, Sex and Power*, Richard Foster writes:

God’s ownership of everything also changes the kind of question we ask in giving. Rather than, “How much of my money should I give to God?” we learn to ask, “How much of God’s money should I keep for myself?” The difference between these two questions is of monumental proportions.

That is the question I am asking this Sunday morning after the mission conference: How would God have us invest in his kingdom this coming year? It is the only completely secure investment we can make. And it is a leading indicator of our consecration to the one whom we call Lord. If we say we trust him, but do not trust him with our resources, we don’t really trust him at all. If we understand that he has commissioned us, his people, to reclaim this lost and dying world, and yet are not deeply involved in that mission, we have not really bowed the knee to him as Lord.

People need the Lord. We have been given unparalleled freedom and resources, and have used them to build safe and secure lives. Why have we not just as intentionally applied our resources to the work of God’s kingdom, the great mission that lies at the heart of the meaning of human history, the mission that has been entrusted to us, the people of God?

This morning I hope to show, through Jesus’ own words, why our attitude toward money and our use of money are so crucial to our own spiritual growth and development, and to the healing of the nations at this particular moment in history.

Body

1. Jesus calls us to live in the light of the future (vv.1-9).

In this strange story, Jesus tells of a dishonest steward who has wasted his master's possessions. Rather than trying to make it up to his master, he decides that he will use what resources are still at his disposal in order to secure his future. *That is the central point Jesus is making.* He is not commending the man for his dishonesty, but rather for his shrewdness in realizing that we should live today with an eye toward the future, and make investments that ensure us a future home. Jesus' emphasis is not on our future life here in this present age, but rather in the age to come, for he says that we should use our money in this present age so as to ensure being welcomed "into the *eternal* dwellings" (16:9). Those of us who realize that this world is not our ultimate home, that this present life is fleeting and eternal life is forever, ought to use the resources entrusted to us to secure a joyful welcome into age to come, into the new heaven and earth.

But, isn't that to imply that we are saved by works rather than by grace through faith? No! It is an illustration of the clear teaching of Scripture that our faith, or lack of faith, is evidenced, not so much by our words as by our deeds. And our attitude toward money is a key indicator of whether or not our faith is authentic. It is the reason that Jesus depicts the final judgment as the moment when the way that we have spent our lives, our time, our energy, our resources, is at last revealed, and our profession of faith is either proven to be true or proven to be false (Matthew 25:31-46).

2. Jesus calls us to live from the resources of the present (vv.10-12)

However much we long to see God's kingdom advance and fill the earth, the real question is what we do *today* with what has been entrusted to us. If we are always putting it off until next year, after the bills are paid and we are more stable and secure financially, we will never step forward and put our money where our mouth is. But if we are faithful with the small things we handle during this life, God will entrust us with far more in eternity. So Jesus says here, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much" (16:10).

The mathematics of God's kingdom is quite different from this world's math. We see it over and over again in the gospels. The only miracle described in all four gospels is the feeding of the five thousand. Why? Because disciples must always realize that we have already been given and have in hand all that is needed to accomplish what God calls us to do. We have only to give it to him, and he will multiply its use. So, too, Mark's account of the widow's penny. Jesus and his disciples are sitting across from the temple treasury as the rich come and put in large sums of money. Then a poor widow approaches and puts in two little copper coins that together make up a penny. To the

watching world, what she has given is insignificant compared to the gifts of the rich. But Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on” (Mark 12:43-44).

3. Jesus calls us to live for the one true God (vv.13-15).

Our use of money reveals what is in our hearts by showing what we really love, the luxuries and comforts of this life, or the advance of the gospel and the extending of God’s kingdom. We must not be deceived: God knows our hearts and sees whether we love him, or merely love the stuff of this affluent culture. Jesus warns us that we cannot serve two masters, both God and money. This brings us to the heart of the Scripture, and to what is clearly the core value of the church: love of God, love of others, and self-sacrificial love of the world. So our use of money answers two crucial questions: What do I really love? And who (or what) is my God, whatever I may profess?

4. So then, where do we begin?

This morning, I am asking you to make clear that the Lord is your God, that you trust him alone and are joining him in his great mission of redeeming the world to himself. Promise the Lord that you will give faithfully and generously this coming year to the global mission of Christ’s church. If you are struggling financially, then make a faith promise: that is, promise to give whatever God has put it in your heart to desire to give, and then trust the Lord to provide the gift in this coming year.

But if you are relatively affluent, as most of us here this morning are, it is hard to make a faith promise, because we have funds available to give to the Lord. It requires no great faith, just simple obedience. I ask you to give in such a way that proves to your own heart and mind that you are significantly investing the resources of this present age in the only thing that will matter in the coming age, and so that anyone who knew how you spend your money would not doubt for a moment that God’s kingdom matters deeply to you.

Conclusion

I’m asking you this morning to be all in, to make the extension of God’s Kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel and the planting of churches one of the great priorities of your life. As Jesus said to his disciples, “Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).

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