

Luke Study 9 - Money, Money, Money Lk 16

Introduction

Not everybody who's a good employee necessarily makes a good boss. A person might be good at their job and do it well, but when they are promoted to a leadership position, they prove themselves incapable of the role. They make a good servant, but bad master.

As Jesus keeps teaching his disciples, he turns now to the issue of money. And this is what he teaches them: money makes a good servant, but bad master.

If his disciples use money the way it's made to be used - as a *servant*, to help build personal relationships - God will bless them: 16:1-13. But if they treat money as an end in itself - as a *master* - and ignore personal relationships as a result, God will punish them: 16:19-31. That is the overall teaching of Luke 16.

Warning: this chapter is complicated. It's probably the hardest part of *Luke* to understand and the so-called 'parable of the shrewd manager' (16:1-13) is probably the hardest of all Jesus' parables to interpret. So we're in for some hard work as we read this text. But even though by the end of it we may not understand all the details, its main points will be clear, and its teaching will be both challenging and encouraging. So let's get into it.

Read Luke 16:1-9

1. What is the manager accused of? (v.1)
2. What does the rich man do as a result? (v.2) Do you think this is fair or unfair?
3. What does the manager do as a result of his master's actions? (vv.3-7)
4. When the master finds out what his manager has done, how does he react? (v.8a)
5. Why did he react this way? (v.8b)
6. How does Jesus apply the story to his hearers? (v.9) What do you think this means?

The manager is accused of wasting his master's possessions. Believing the accusation, the master sacks the manager without giving him an opportunity to defend himself: whatever sort of person the manager may be, the master is clearly unfair. Realising he needs to find another job, the manager concocts a plan: in the time he has left in the role, he will reduce the debts of his master's clients so that, once he finally has to leave, they will help him. He may or may not have been dishonest beforehand, but he's certainly dishonest now!

But when his master discovers the plan, he responds surprisingly. Rather than get angry, he commends him! Why? Because the manager acted 'shrewdly.' Even though he cheated

him of money, the manager showed a resourcefulness that the master nonetheless finds commendable (given his own ruthlessness in v.2, the master may have seen something of himself in him!) Jesus says this kind of mutual shrewdness is not unusual in the people of this world. In fact, they are shrewder with each other than are the 'people of the light,' i.e. disciples.

What *is* unusual is what Jesus then does with this observation. We expect him to condemn this shrewdness. But actually, he encourages it! He tells his disciples, like the manager, to use money to make friends so they can obtain future benefit, i.e. 'be welcomed into eternal dwellings.' What is going on here?

It's important to note that Jesus isn't endorsing every aspect of the manager's behaviour, e.g. his active dishonesty. Rather, he's just extracting from an extremely vivid story a basic point: disciples should use money to make friends. That is, they should realise what every person in the world realises: that money isn't an end in itself but is there to serve a bigger purpose - building relationships. If they can make their money work for them in that way, then God will reward them in eternal life.

But isn't that then saying that eternal life is something people *earn*, by something they *do*, i.e. use their money wisely? No. But we have to look at the next verses to see why.

Read Luke 16:10-12

7. What general principle does Jesus lay out in v.10?
8. How does he then apply it to money in vv.11-12?

Having talked about *behaviour* when it comes to money, Jesus now digs down to the next layer: *character*.

First, he lays out a general principle: if you can be trusted with a little, you can be trusted with a lot; if you're dishonest with a little, you'll be dishonest with a lot. That is, character is character: it doesn't matter what you've been given, the way you will manage it will be determined by who you are.

Then he applies this principle to money. If you don't know how to use money for what it's for - building relationships - then how will God be able to entrust you with the much more valuable treasure of eternal life? If you can't use God's property (money), how can he give you property of your own (eternal life)?

Again, it seems like Jesus is saying that whether you go to heaven or not depends on how you use money. But he's not. He's not saying how you use money is what *earns* you a place in heaven. Rather, he's saying it's just *evidence* of something - who you serve - that *is* what determines your eternal future. That's the point he makes next.

Read Luke 16:13-15

9. What does Jesus say here about God and money?

10. How do the Pharisees react to this teaching? Why?

11. What is Jesus' judgment on them?

Just as our actions (v.9) come from our character (vv.10-12), so our character comes from who we serve (v.13). And who we serve determines our future. The Pharisees had chosen to serve money - they 'loved' it (v.14) - and that choice was detestable in God's eyes (v.15). Rather we should serve God - entrust ourselves to his care - and that will result in us being given 'true riches,' i.e. salvation. How we use money will just be evidence of who we have chosen to serve. If we serve money, we will trust in that to save us, and so will be reluctant to spend it on others. If we serve *God*, we will trust in *him* save us, and so will feel freer to spend money on others.

To summarise: Jesus tells us to use money to build relationships. If we use it that way, we will be showing that we know it is our servant, not our master, and that God is our master. As a result of having God as our master - entrusting ourselves to him - he will welcome us into eternal dwellings.

Before we move on to the remainder of the chapter, it's worthwhile thinking through how this applies to us.

12. How can we use money helpfully to build relationships?

13. How does knowing God is our master help us be freer in spending money on other people?

So far, Jesus has taught us how to use money as a servant. In a moment, he's going to teach us the danger of treating it like a master. But before he does, he's going to say some things about the law that will seem disconnected at first but, by the end, will make sense.

Read Luke 16:16-18

14. What was the guiding principle of behaviour 'until John'? (v.16a)

15. What has been the guiding principle 'since that time'? (v.16b)

16. Does the former guiding principle still have any use? (v.17; the verse in the original starts with a 'but')

The way people knew God's mind on morality before Jesus was the law and the prophets. Now, they have it fully revealed to them in the good news of the kingdom. But that doesn't mean the law and the prophets are now irrelevant: they still accurately communicate how God thinks we should live. Although this seems disconnected to what Jesus is now saying, it will become clear by the end of his next story.

Read Luke 16:19-31

17. Who are the two people in the story? How are they different? (vv.19-21)
18. What happens to them both? (v.22)
19. How are their situations different now? (v.23)
20. What does the rich man ask for? (vv.24)
21. What is Abraham's reply? (vv.25-26)
22. What does the rich man ask for then? (vv.27-28)
23. What is Abraham's reply? (vv.29-31)
24. What do you think the point of this story is, in the context of the whole chapter?

Jesus has told us to have *money as our servant* and *God as our master*: that way, we will be 'welcomed into eternal dwellings' (v.9). Now, he tells the story of someone who evidently had *money as his master* - the rich man - and suffered as a consequence: he went to hell.

The rich man is selfish. He knows Lazarus and knows he needs help, but doesn't give it to him. He does not use 'worldly wealth to gain friends.' As a result, when both men die, their roles are reversed: Lazarus is sent to Abraham's side (heaven) and the rich man is sent to Hades (technically the place of the dead, but here, effectively, hell). The rich man begs for relief but Abraham says he can't have any; essentially, 'You had your god back on earth - money - and it gave you what it had to give you. Lazarus is now getting what his God can give him. In other words, you're getting what you deserve for your idolatry.' (v.25)

The rich man then asks if Lazarus can be sent to his five brothers - who are still alive and presumably living a similarly selfish lifestyle - to warn them of the consequences. Again, Abraham says no: they have already been warned in Moses (i.e. the law) and the prophets, and even sending a resurrected man to them will make no difference. It's God they're not listening to: changing the medium by which he communicates won't change anything.

Now it becomes clear why Jesus said what he did in verses 16-18. Though the kingdom of God is now being preached, God still speaks through the law and the prophets (v.17). The law and the prophets are full of commands to care for the poor and warnings about what happens to you if you don't (e.g. Dt 15:1-11, Isa 58:67). Therefore, the rich man's brothers have already been warned about their lifestyle and its consequences, says Abraham: '*They have Moses and the Prophets: let them listen to them.*' (v.29).

Of course, this also has implications for the Pharisees. They love money. It is their master. In this sense, they are exactly like the rich man and his brothers. So they, too, are going to hell if they don't repent. Will they listen to the warnings, both from Jesus, and the law and the prophets? Or not?

As we conclude, it's worthwhile asking a couple of questions about how this applies to us.

25. Think of a time when you were tempted not to be generous with your money. Why do you think this happened? What stopped you from being generous?

26. What can we do to protect ourselves from being too attached to money (and hence stingy)?

Phew! You made it! Let's pray.