

A LESSON FROM THE WORLD

LUKE 16:1-14

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Late in His ministry, Jesus spent a lot of His time speaking in parables. On one of those occasions, some religious leaders came and asked Him why He ate dinner with sinners. Jesus answered them by emphasizing the fact that God considers a lost soul to be very important. He used the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin and the lost son to emphasize this truth. Those parables are recorded in LUKE 15.

Then, while the religious leaders were still standing around listening, Jesus turned to His disciples and directed a parable to them. It was the parable of the shrewd manager recorded in LUKE 16:1-14.

For most of my life I did not understand the meaning of this parable. But, after I began to discover the truth that it teaches, my attitude about using my money to help non-Christians began to change. Let me share with you what I discovered.

The parable starts off with a story of a very shrewd manager. What he did was wrong. He had no right to change those accounts. But, he was very clever. He had been robbing his master and was about to be fired from his job. He decided to make himself safe by robbing his master again. He was a crook through and through. He said he didn't have the strength to dig. More likely, he wasn't willing to dig. He said he was too ashamed to beg. And, perhaps that is the only decent thing recorded about him, and yet even that was evidence of pride.

Jesus ends the story by saying the master commended him. At first glance, this seems like a very strange story for Jesus to tell. It seems as if our Lord was condoning bad behavior, encouraging His disciples to disobey the eighth commandment. But, to come to that conclusion would be to deny everything else that Jesus taught and did. There must be another lesson that Jesus was trying to teach. And, there is a good chance that the lesson relates to the importance of reaching those who are lost, because that is what Jesus just finished talking about in LUKE 15.

The key to understanding the meaning of the story is found in the second half of verse 8. "For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind (or their own generation) than are the people of the light."

Notice that Jesus was not praising the manager for what he did. He was being commended for his shrewdness and perception, not for his actions. Notice, too, that Jesus was not saying, "The sons of this age are wiser than the sons of light." Instead, He was saying that the sons of this age are wiser or shrewder in dealing with their own kind or their own generation than the sons of light.

Do you get the picture? The religious leaders, the Pharisees and the Scribes, were standing around Jesus. They were lovers of money. Verse 14 says that the Pharisees were those who loved money. Therefore, they represented the sons of this age. They were materialistic people. The disciples of Jesus were also present. But, materialism was not the most important thing to them. They were the sons of light.

Here is Jesus saying to His disciples, "These guys are more shrewd and perceptive and dedicated in attaining their material wealth than you are in making your witness count. They are more clever in carrying out their goals than you are in carrying out your goals. This parable was a kind of rebuke directed toward the disciples.

Is it possible for Christians to learn lessons from the world? Well, in this case, it seems to be.

I am impressed whenever I think about all the discipline and sacrifice that athletes must have in order to compete in the Olympics. Each one will spend thousands of dollars and countless hours to receive top-quality training.

Thinking about these things sometimes makes me feel ashamed. What is my goal in life? Am I willing to be as dedicated in reaching it as those who compete in the Olympics are at reaching their goal of winning a medal?

Christ's parable had a lesson to it. You can find the lesson beginning 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."

Here, Christ is declaring that money or material possessions are neither good nor bad. Some people say that money is the root of all evil. But, that is wrong. "The love of money is the root of all evil" is the proper translation. Jesus does not forbid us to have worldly wealth, but He wants us to use it for the right reasons.

Jesus says that we are to use our worldly wealth to make friends so that they may some day be able to have eternal life. And, how do we do that? We do it in just the opposite way that the dishonest manager did it. He loved money and robbed for it. We must love people and give money to win them. The main difference is in the motivation.

Our love for the lost should be so great that we would want to give our wealth to win them. The world places a great deal of pressure on us to own homes and cars and to have a great amount of money saved up for the education of our children and for retirement. Now, it's not morally wrong to own these things and build for ourselves these securities. But, just to do these things keeps many people working so much that they have no time to make friends and spend time witnessing the love of God to them. If we really want to win the lost, we must break away from the world's standards. Some of us need to be willing to live at a lower standard so that we can invest our time and money in helping people know God.

And, at this point I must add a word of caution. I have learned that it is easy to start off right and end up wrong. We begin by sacrificing our wealth so that souls can be won for God's kingdom. This is good. But, it is easy for pride to enter in, so that we end up paying more attention to what we are doing and forget why we are doing it. When we start paying more attention to ourselves, then our intentions are no longer good. Many people have started out good by using their money to help people know God and ended up corrupted by using their money or by using people to draw attention to themselves and to their ministry. May God protect us from making this mistake, because all of us, including myself, are vulnerable.

When we use our worldly wealth to help others, we must do so with a pure motive of love and concern for their eternal wellbeing. Using people or money to draw attention to ourselves is wrong.

I do not think it is wrong to desire a reward for sacrificing our wealth to help others know God. But we must resist the temptation of desiring to receive this reward while we are still living upon this earth.

I am not saying it is wrong to express our appreciation to people for their services such as you have done to me today. It is very edifying when we encourage one another to continue on doing our best to serve. Today I feel encouraged, and I am deeply grateful for everything you have done to express your appreciation to my family and me.

However, it would be wrong for me to allow your expressions of appreciation to become the main thing that drives me in my ministry. It would also be wrong for me to use such expressions of appreciation or lack of such expressions to measure my own self-worth. I should not look forward to receiving this kind of reward. If it comes, I should be grateful. But, I should not expect it like a child expects to receive gifts on his birthday or at Christmas.

According to the words of Christ in this parable, the only kind of reward we should look forward to receiving is the reward that we will receive when we leave this earth and enter heaven. At that time, there will be people to greet us saying, "Thank you, because you were willing to give, I am here. Thank you, because you were willing to pray, I am here. Thank you, because you were willing to spend time with me instead of earning money, I can now dwell in heaven forever with my Lord." Jesus said, "Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

The rewards we receive on this earth are only for a short time. During one winter Olympics, a young woman was interviewed by the media. She had come, not to participate, but to watch. As a spectator, no one paid her any attention. All the attention and glory went to those who were winning the events. No one knew who she was, and probably no one cared. However, four years earlier, she had won a gold medal in a skiing event. But, four years is a long time. All the years of practice and dedication had brought her fame, but only for a short while.

Money can either be used as a blessing or a curse. In any case, it will fail. It will be gone. Sixty seconds after a man is dead, he cannot sign a check. The sons of this age are more clever in their own generation, but that's where

it ends. They cannot take their money or their fame or their material wealth with them.

Listen carefully, it all boils down to this: we cannot serve two masters. We will either hate the one and love the other, or hold on to one and despise the other. We cannot serve God and money.

In verse 13, Jesus used the word “master.” A master owns his servants and demands their total time. And, for those who have been slaves to materialism, they know how difficult it is to become free. In fact, without Christ, it is impossible to free ourselves from our own selfish ambitions that cause us to use money and to use people for our own personal gain. But, Jesus can free us from the master of materialism and fill our hearts full of love for the lost.

Some of you have not yet enslaved yourselves to the master of materialism that rules the lives of so many people. Some of you are not worried about losing your jobs, because you have no jobs to lose. You are still young, and you have begun to learn how to allow God to be your master. That is good.

By God’s grace, you are on the right track. You have chosen the right master. But, in the years to come, I can guarantee you that the world will force you to think hard about changing masters. A time will come when you will realize that the only way to spend adequate time making friendships that will result in people receiving eternal life is for you to give up something that the world doesn’t want you to give up. The time will come when you will realize that if you decide to give up owning your own house or your own business or your own car—or if you decide not to have a large bank account or a high paying job, or a large retirement, then you will be considered a foolish person by both friends and relatives. At that time, it will not be so easy to decide which master to serve.

As children of the light, our determination to use our wealth and time to love the lost should not be less than the determination of those who belong to this world to use people to gain wealth and fame. That’s what the parable of the shrewd manager teaches us. Look at how determined the people of the world are in reaching their goals. We should not be less determined than they are.

At this time, we are going to listen to a song by Ray Boltz entitled “Thank You.” The words of the song will encourage us to focus our attention on the reward we will receive after we leave this earth. I personally believe that this is a healthy thing to do. While we hear the song and think about this special kind of reward that only comes on the other side of the grave, let’s allow God to speak to us. May the Holy Spirit inspire us in such a way that we will increase in our determination to be willing to give up that which is sure to perish in order to gain that which will last forever.

“Thank You”
by Ray Boltz

I dreamed I went to heaven. You were there with me.
We walked upon the streets of gold, beside the crystal sea.
We heard the angels singing, and someone called your name.
I turned and saw this young man, and he was smiling as he came.
And He said, “Friend, you may not know me now,”
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.”

Chorus:

Thank you for giving to the Lord.
I am a life that was changed.
Thank you for giving to the Lord.
I am so glad you gave.

Then another man stood before you, and said,
“Remember the time? A missionary came to your church. His pictures made you cry.
You didn’t have much money, but you gave it anyway.
Jesus took the gift you gave, and that’s why I’m here today.”

One by one they came, far as the eye could see.
Each life somehow touched by your generosity.
Little things that you had done, sacrifices made.
Unnoticed on the earth, in heaven now proclaimed

I know up in heaven you’re not supposed to cry.
But I am almost sure there were tears in your eyes
As Jesus took your hand, you stood before the Lord
He said, “My child look around you. For great is your reward.”