

We can't love God and money

Luke 16:1-13 (September 18, 2022)

Luke 16: 1-13

16Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ²So he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ ³Then the manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’ ⁵So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ ⁷Then he asked another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’ ⁸And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. ⁹And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. ¹⁰“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹²And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Historical Context

To try to understand this parable (Luke 16:1-8a) and the attached sayings (verses 8b-13) in the context of Luke’s narrative world, we need a mini-course on the economics of Roman-occupied Galilee in the first century. Rich landlords and rulers were loan-sharks, using exorbitant interest rates to amass more land and to disinherit peasants of their family land, in direct violation of biblical covenantal law. The rich man or “lord” (kyrios, v. 3, 8), along with his steward or debt collector, were both exploiting desperate, illiterate peasants.

Theme: We can't love God and money

You cannot serve both God and wealth. That’s the bottom line. It’s the truth that this parable is seeking. If all we care about is getting wealthier, our relationships grow less important. We don’t care about the customer—just the customer’s money. We’ll give up time with family and friends to focus on what we think is more important at the moment. We don’t hang with our kids because we think we’re trying to make a better life for them.

If all we care about is getting wealthier, our bodies will suffer. We’ll be more stressed, less healthy, we’ll play less and sleep less, and eat things that aren’t as good for us. Because time is money, and you don’t get rich by taking walks and riding your bike, or by growing a garden and making a nice salad.

If all we care about is getting wealthier, our spiritual lives shrivel. This is just the truth that we feel in our bones. We find ourselves pulling away from our own spirits until the desire to be spiritual seems ridiculous.

We can't love God and money. But it's hard to figure out the balance. We have to work, have to pay the rent, buy shoes and school supplies for the kids, make sure we'll someday be able to retire without burdening those kids.

Jesus doesn't say it'll be easy to do, this finding a balance. It will likely take a lifetime for most of us. But it's worth the work of balancing. It's worth the spiritual act of seeking money's proper place in our lives and souls.

Our spirits will suffer if we don't.