

“Generosity And Money Again”

August 5, 2018

Luke 16:1-14

SI: We’re looking at the theme of generosity through the lens of several stories in the Gospel of Luke.

I’ve made the point each week that generosity is not just giving money.

Generosity is a quality of the heart.

It’s a spiritual virtue that comes from knowing the generous grace of God.

It’s possible to be technically generous with money but not generous in heart.

I’ll write a check, but don’t make me be personally involved.

Generosity is more than money but it’s certainly not less than money.

A sense in which generosity is most vividly displayed in giving money.

We looked last week at money in Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler.

Let’s look at one of his parables this morning.

INTRO: What do you hate spending money on?

One time when we had to buy four tires and Allison saw what a ding they made in the budget she said: Tires are the worst. I hate spending money on tires.

I hate spending money on insurance.

I know I'm getting security and peace of mind, but every time I write a check for it I can't help thinking how much I'd rather spend that money on something else.

What do you love spending money on?

For Allison it's our children.

So she's been very happy lately with Eliza's upcoming wedding.

Lots of happy spending.

Just a day or two ago she showed me the receipt for the reception and said:

Before I show this to you I want you to remember your sermons on generosity.

We're going to be very generous to our friends and give them a good time!

She was loving it.

For you it might also be people you love, or your hobbies, or maybe vacations or fun experiences. We love to spend money on things we love and value.

In fact you could turn that around and say that the things you freely and openly spend your money on are the things you love the most.

That's why money is such a big deal in the Bible.

Because the way we spend it is a window into our hearts.

So as Christians we take our attitude toward money very seriously.

We have to. There are important spiritual implications.

Jesus told this parable to help his followers, to help us, understand our relationship to money and spend our money in ways that please him.

Let's look at this parable under two points:

1. You are a manager of the Lord's money
2. He wants you to spend it to make heaven a happier place

MP#1 You are a manager of the Lord's money

This parable has always been a challenge to Bible readers because Jesus says he wants us to be like the manager but the manager's a dishonest person.

I think when we read this we pretty much understand that it's not his dishonesty Jesus is commending it's his shrewd use of money to make friends.

But his dishonesty is a confusing element that muddies the water.

So let's look at this detail before we get to the application.

A rich man had a manager. He's called a steward in some Bible versions.

As manager he had authority to run the master's estate, make investments, spend money, and so forth. But he's accused of mismanagement, so he's fired. The master tells him to put things in order and then get out.

The manager knows he will never get a job in his field.

He's too soft for manual labor. He's too proud to beg.

So he calls in his master's debtors. These were people the manager had loaned money to as part of his oversight of the master's finances.

He knew these people personally and had dealings with them.

So he called them in and forgave large portions of their debt.

50% off in once case, 20% of in another.

This created an enormous amount of goodwill for the manager.

The debtors were extremely grateful. The manager knew that when he was out of a job and needed a favor, he could go to them for help and they would put in a good word or open a door for him.

When the master hears what the manager has done he commends him.

He says even though you're dishonest, you're shrewd in use of money.

But his response seems implausible.

Why didn't the master become furious and legally undo manager's actions?

Now of course this is a parable. It's a made-up story to teach a lesson.

In a made-up story you can have details that aren't true to life.

But for it to be effective to Jesus' original audience, it would have to strike them as a plausible scenario.

One explanation that makes sense is that this was what sociologists call an honor-shame culture. In an honor-shame culture honor is the highest value and it consists of the acknowledgement of worth and prestige by the group.

So the reason the master was not furious is this wasn't an entirely bad thing for him.

He got something out of it. It bought him goodwill and honor in the town.

It would make him seem like a generous person.

So the dishonest manager's actions actually resulted in honor for the rich master. Let's focus on the fact that this main character was a manager. He was a steward of money that was not his. This has a direct application for us. We are all stewards of money that is not ours. We are managers of the Lord's money.

Americans, maybe more than anyone else, have a deep impulse to say: This is my money. I made it. But it's not your money. You have to be alive to make money. Who gave you life? God did. You have to be healthy to make money, healthy enough to move and think. Who wakes you up every morning and gives you strength? God does. It's God who opens doors and gives you opportunities. It's God who has given you talents and education. Of course you've worked, but you owe all you've been able to do to him.

King David said:

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours . . . Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.

So if God tells you to be generous with his money and you're not—you're not just being stingy, you're stealing.

You're a manager embezzling the master's money.

In Malachi 3 which we read earlier, the Lord asks the Israelites:

Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.

And the Israelites respond: How do we rob you?

And God says: In tithes and offerings you are robbing me.

Then he says, Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse.

If all money belongs to God and if God has made you manager of a particular amount of money, then you have to come to terms with the Bible's teaching about tithing. Tithing is giving a tenth of your income.

I mentioned last week that some Christians argue the tithe was an OT command that only applied to civil life in Israel, that it doesn't apply to Christians today. I don't find their arguments convincing but I do find the arguments for tithing to be very compelling.

The argument for the continuation of the tithe is basically this:

The tithe can't be just for the national Israel because it predates the law of Moses. Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek after receiving a priestly blessing from him.

Jacob vowed a tithe to God at Bethel after his dream of the stairway to heaven. The Patriarchs are for us a pattern of the life of faith.

The tithe was one way they expressed their faith in Yahweh.

Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. He said you tithe, but you ignore the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Then Jesus says: You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. In other words, Jesus affirms tithing as a part of God's law.

The New Testament never specifically says: Christians must tithe.

But in 1 Corinthians 16 Paul affirms the principle of proportionate giving.

Different amounts, depending on your income, but the same proportions.

The only thing missing in Paul's instruction is the exact proportion.

The argument is that Paul didn't have to spell out the proportion, because the rest of the Bible makes clear—one tenth—as practiced by all saints in Scripture.

Suppose someone told you: I want you to manage my money.

And from my annual income, you can keep 90%. You just give me 10%.

That would be a sweet job.

That's the managerial job the Lord has given you.

You keep 90% to live on and give the rest away—

to your church, to causes and ministries on your heart, to needy people.

Now you might imagine that Jesus would end this parable by urging us, his followers to give because it's going to bless people here and now.

That's what mostly motivates us.

If someone approached you about giving to the Foundry Farm, they would tell you how your gift will be used to deliver men from drug addiction.

If Shane Terrell asked you to support Campus Outreach he would tell you how your money will be used to evangelize and disciple students at the U of A.

But Jesus says something about giving that seems like an odd motivation, at least it does to me. He wants you to spend money to make heaven a happier place.

I don't think I've ever heard someone make this sort of appeal for Christian giving.

Let's think about this idea that

MP#2 The Lord wants you to spend money to make heaven a happier place

What did the dishonest manager do that earned the master's admiration?

He invested the master's money to gain for himself long-term relationships.

He put money into building goodwill and friendships with people that would pay off in the future when he was out of a job.

Jesus says that even people of this world understand this.

Even unbelievers understand the wisdom of not spending all their money on themselves but spending some of it on other people to build goodwill and lasting relationships that will benefit them in the future if they are in need.

Then Jesus reprimands us, his followers. He calls us the people of light.

He says, the people of the world are more shrewd using money to build future relationships than are the children of light.

The reason Jesus says that about us is that we have an eternal perspective

but we don't think carefully enough about the implications concerning money.

For people of this world, their perspective is just this life.

If I cultivate these relationships, then if I lose my job I'll have some people who will welcome me when I ask them to help me by opening some doors.

But as Christians we have a much bigger perspective.

We know that one day everybody is going to lose all their money, us included.

No material asset in this world will last.

You put your money in a vault in a mountain in Switzerland it will be lost to you one day because you're going to die.

And the relationships you cultivate here for business and financial benefit—those are going to be lost to you too when they die or you die.

So, Jesus says, if you know those things are going away then put your money into something that will truly last.

He says: Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

He's talking about heaven.

What's your image of heaven? What's your image of eternal dwellings?

Streets of gold. Rivers of crystal. Angel choirs?

Those are all certainly biblical images of heaven but I would venture to say they don't get you very excited. I'm not disrespecting them.

They all reveal important truths but they're a little abstract.

So how does Jesus describe heaven in this parable? One word: Friends.

Friends welcoming you

Here's what one commentator said about this parable:

Although these things, your property, ability, and time belong to this life only, what will happen to you then, when you pass into the afterlife, will depend on what you are doing with them here and now. Make sure that your use of your money brings you into a fellowship of friends that will survive beyond death."

A fellowship of friends that will survive beyond death.

That's exactly what Jesus is saying because that's what the manager realized.

The most important thing for me to have facing certain loss is friends.

And what heaven will be for followers of Jesus is a place of friends.

When most people hear the name Jonathan Edwards his famous sermon

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God comes to mind.

But Edwards didn't just preach hellfire and brimstone, he preached the whole Bible.

And he had another famous sermon titled:

Heaven Is a World of Love.

In that sermon he says that as important as love is to us, and as much as

people search for love and long for love, even when they find it,

love here, in this life, is a source of pain Jesus:

He mentions five barriers to love here and then he explains how in heaven those barriers are going to be removed.

First, we all want to be loved for our own sake, we don't want to be used.

We don't want people to love us to get something out of us.

But that's the way a lot of love is.

And if we admitted it, none of us love people purely that way. We want something.

But in heaven we will love people for their own sake and be loved that way too.

Second, we want to express love without impediment, and to be loved that way.

Someone told me just this week about a woman whose father never hugged her until she was 40 years old. She knew he loved her, but couldn't express it.

Whether it's pride or coldness or psychological hang-ups or way we were raised—there are all sorts of things that impede love's expression. We can't get close.

We wonder about ourselves, Why am I so unloving to the people I love.

But in heaven, all impediments will be removed.

We'll enjoy a delicious freedom and vulnerability.

Third, we want to love mutually. When we love somebody want to be loved back.

Love wants an answer love.

But there are always people you love who don't love back.
In heaven, you will always be loved back.

Fourth, if you love somebody and they aren't happy, you can't be happy either.

You know the saying: Parents are never happier than their unhappiest child.

When those you love are in pain then you are too.

C.S. Lewis said that the only way to keep your heart from being broken is to harden your heart and quit loving. But then he says you're on your way to hell.

In heaven all the people you love will be happy.

Fifth, we want to love without parting.

But even on the happy occasion of a wedding there is that line in the traditional service: Till death do us part.

In every marriage, no matter how deep the love, one will bury the other.

Unless you happen to go out together.

When you're around the table at Thanksgiving, seeing all the faces you love, there are coming years when certain faces will no longer be there.

Not so in heaven. Those we love will always be there.

We were meant for heavenly love. We were made for a fellowship of friends.
And you can have that love through faith in Jesus Christ.

Your failures to love people rightly and freely is a terrible evil.

It's a selfish disregard for people made in God's image, people made for love.
Jesus died on the cross so you can be forgiven of all your failures to love people.

Ask him to forgive you and he will.

And Jesus also, through his resurrection, has made a way for you to live forever in eternal dwellings and be surrounded by welcoming friends.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich,

yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Rich in friends.

But what Jesus tells us here is that there is a connection between the way you generously give the Lord's money here and now and the number and depth of your friendships and welcome in heaven.

That seems odd when you first hear it. Does it mean some people will have more friends in heaven and a heartier and happier welcome than others?

Yes, it does.

The Bible is not at all shy about saying that in heaven there will be rewards for God's people who are all saved by grace alone.

Of course there will be all joy and no rivalry or jealousy but there will be rewards.

Rewards for faithfulness. Rewards for the martyrs.

Jesus says in another parable that some will be given 5 cities to rule, some 10. And he says here that generous giving of the Lord's money in this life will result in ringing and happy welcomes when you come into the heavenly city.

How God works this out I don't have any idea.

Because sometimes we give to particular people and know money helping them, but very often we don't. Much of our giving is to the church and it goes to different expenses and some of it goes to missionaries.

Somehow God sees how the money we give builds specific future friendships.

And that will be one of the interesting things about life in the world to come, discovering this web of relationships we didn't even know about.

There's a popular Christian song that I'm sure most of you know,

Thank You For Giving To the Lord. It came out in the 80s.

It's a ballad and in the opening stanza the singer imagines he's in heaven

and someone calls out his name and it's a young man he doesn't recognize at first.

Young man say: You my not remember, but you taught my Sunday school class when I was eight years old and that's why I'm here. Thank you.

Then there's another stanza:

Then another man stood before me 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.

Then one more verse:

One by one they came, As far as the eye could see,

Each one somehow touched By your generosity.

Little things that you had done, sacrifices made,

Unnoticed on the earth, heaven now proclaims.

Jesus says: Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves

so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into heavenly dwellings.