

The Parables: #3 “Making Every Dirty Penny Count”

Luke 16:1-13 -- 3/21/2010

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Before we get started, let me tell you about a really great ministry at Grace called Jump Start. There is sign up for Jump Start in the foyer. It is a fabulous ministry if you want to get connected at Grace because you are relatively new here. It is a seven-week course, starting next Sunday, during the first hour, and meets in Echelon IV, Room 104. Besides a great way to get connected, the bigger purpose of Jump Start is to allow you to discover the way God made you with spiritual gifts and temperamental gifts He has given you, the experiences in your background, your age, all these things meld into an opportunity. The leaders of Jump Start are able to help you with that opportunity for you to plug into a place and either serve or lead at Grace Covenant Church. So, if you are looking for something like that, by all means look into Jump Start, starting next Sunday at 9:15 in the Echelon IV Building.

Today, turn in your Bibles to Luke 16 and we will look at another parable. Before we get there, let me tell you, for introductory purposes, a fun little thing you probably did not notice. Two years ago in November at the World Championship of Monopoly in Las Vegas, Nevada, where they have the tournament every year, they were down to the final four and it was coming towards the close of that. One of the guys in the final four, Keith Watkins, looked at the clock and realized there were 45 minutes left. He looked around and smirked and took all his assets, money and all properties, and divided them up among the other three people. He gave them out to the two guys and the woman who was there. Then he put his hands on his lap and said, “I am out.” The whole Monopoly world was shocked that someone would get to the final four and then card out.

After the whole thing was over, he was asked about what he did. He said, *I thought that there was less than an hour to go and I have really grown to like these guys since we travel together a lot and end up in championships. I thought, I'll just give my stuff away and then maybe I will make a friend out of it, a life time friend. As it turned out, I didn't have anywhere to go for Christmas and I am going to the runner up's house for Christmas, all because I gave him this little card that reads Park Place. Now I am going to join him for Christmas.* He was pretty shrewd, Keith Watkins.

As most of you know, this is not a real story because you know that Monopoly is not a timed sport. That gave it away at the very beginning.

The point is that when Jesus taught, He often taught in parables, or fables, or stories. The reason He did is because Jesus taught how to think about all of life. He did not teach a lot of how-to's. I don't know if you noticed that. He taught in paradigms, perspectives and the way we think about things because He knew that if we identify what our values are and why we consider something important, what we live our lives around, and what we even enjoy and why, if He could address that and put it in the perspective of a person who has lived a long time in eternity, then all the little details would take care of themselves. We might start giving away our money and property like it is a Monopoly game. So, that is why He tells so many parables or stories because He is trying to right our wrong perspective on life.

Most of us think our pictures are hanging straight but it is only because we have a crick in our neck and really our pictures all hang sideways. He comes up and says – Let me straighten your neck out and then you can re-hang all those paintings.

He does this change of perspective rather aggressively in a fun story in Luke 16:1-13. There are three or four different views on this and I am going to do the one that seemed to make the most sense to me.

Luke 16:1 Jesus told His disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions ..

The word *wasting* is the same one we read about in the parable of the prodigal son. This guy is spending it, blowing it on the here and now. Whatever feels good, he does that.

:2 So he [the manager's boss] called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’

:3 The manager said to himself ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg.

:4 I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.

:5 So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

Let me stop for a second. The manager is starting to realize, thinking for the first time about tomorrow instead of just today. He was wasting his money on the here and now on whatever made him feel good. Jesus is showing that this man is starting to finally plan ahead. He is not talking about his focal point as what he values; that is not the theme.

The theme here is the distance of what he values. He is going to need a place to stay later. Now he is going to shave his commissions and maybe any interest owed for the people who owed his master so

that he can win favors with them. So, maybe a week later, he would be homeless and these people would have a bed for him.

:6 [the first debtor] ‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. “The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’

That debtor is thinking – You bet.

:7 “Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’

‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied.

He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

Now the master has found out about this and here is the master’s view of his manager.

:8 The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.

[‘people of the light’ – people of the church]

I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone (and it will be gone soon), you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

He is saying to be shrewd with your position and your money and your possessions so that later on, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

Jesus is saying – We are like the business manager. Not that we are unethical or we are blowing our money on the here and now, for whatever pleasures we might have. But rather we are supposed to be acting shrewdly like the manager because (1) it won’t be here long – our possessions and our position. This manager has a week left under this title. (2) It is not even his stuff anyway. It belonged to the master.

Our stuff is not our stuff. Our personalities and temperaments are not ours but are on loan. We are supposed to act shrewdly like that.

: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 is the big point here. This is what I want you to take home today: **To be a follower of Christ, it is not enough to be GOOD, or DEDICATED. You must be SHREWD!**

You must be shrewd with your position and with your possessions. You need to do this to be a great follower of Christ.

How do you become shrewd?

How are you supposed to be shrewd, if that is the definition of a good Christ follower? Look at Philippians 4:17, a great verse that explains how you can make the most out of your position and your possessions. Paul is writing a thank you letter to the Philippians and he writes this about their giving towards his missions work.

Philippians 4:17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.

Paul is saying – When you guys give to the expansion of the Gospel across all of Europe, and especially Rome, when you see what is happening in the ministry I am able to do, you get credit for that in your account. The Roman Empire is being touched because of your generosity.

That is a value statement. It is investing in the future. When some of the people of the Philippian church got to heaven, there were people from Rome who might have said – ‘There are the Wilson’s! Welcome to heaven!’ ‘I’m sorry but we have not met.’ ‘We kind of have met. I met Paul who introduced me to Christ. The reason I am here is because you gave him the money to get to Rome. I just wanted to say thanks.’ That is what Paul is referring to as how to be shrewd according to that Philippian passage.

If you were to do a survey of the last year here or even the from the beginning of this year here at Grace Covenant, to look at the giving towards general Global Outreach (the conference we had for two Sundays), we are giving generously to people in Africa, India, Europe, Russia, all these places. You and I, when we give to that general fund of missions, it changes people’s lives. You and I, because we are shrewd with our possessions, will be greeted in heaven in eternal dwellings.

In the midst of all that, remember the Haiti catastrophe and this church raised over \$40,000 in about 10 days. We sent people and resources. Guess what? Some day there will be some person who lost a leg but now has regained a new leg in their eternal state. They are saying – Hey, thank you so much for giving to that doctor who shared Christ with me and he did more than save my leg, he saved my soul. You played a part in that.

Two weeks after that, we thought we might hit a bump in the road around here because so much giving was taking place. We had an offering for Life Care Pregnancy Center and \$14,000 was given. Can you imagine what it must be like to be greeted in heaven when you literally participated in saving and in sustaining a human life? That is going to be a very happy person greeting you there, a very warm and excited individual because you chose to act shrewdly.

People do this and not just with this specific giving that we do here at Grace but also from our general fund. Some of our money goes, for example, to the Youth Group because many of us cannot do ministry to those students. Last summer, I realized – no more lock-ins. I have done my last all-nighter.

Those kids will not sleep. I thought I had one or two more in me. No, I will just delegate – shrewdly – to the right people.

That is how it works with the Children’s Ministry and a lot of the ministries around here. People can use their position and use their possessions to do that.

An acquaintance of a friend of mine is a medical doctor, an ob/gyn, and he is gone now. His name is Chris Riley and every year at Christmas time, Dr. Riley would look over the patients who owed him money for the services he had provided to them. He would get out a pen and stationery and write a handwritten letter. He would stack them up and look at the patients, knowing about their backgrounds, and he knew they could not pay these bills back to him. He would write his story and it went something like this:

“I want you to know that what you owe our office and what you owe me is completely forgiven. The reason I want you to know that and I want you to be relieved of that debt is that twenty years ago, when I was a young intern, someone told me about Jesus Christ and told me that the reason He came to earth was that He could die on a cross and by dying on a cross could take away my sins. I just owe God such a tremendous debt to His holiness, I couldn’t pay it. I just knew I was in bad shape and then I discovered that Jesus had paid everything I owed. I am a forgiven man and I just wanted you to feel in a small way what I feel when I think about the coming of Christ. I would like for you to consider taking Christ as a Savior.”

He would handwrite that note every Christmas.

Can you imagine how many people trusted Christ because Dr. Riley initiated generosity and sacrifice. How many mothers and children who preceded him into heaven greeted him there at a place of eternal dwelling to say – *Hey, doc, thanks so much for that letter and that forgiveness that you gave me.* You see, he used his position and his possessions in a way that made sense. He used them shrewdly.

The best way to understand this, to get this parable, is a little like the story of the Monopoly finals. You have to understand that our position and our possessions the way God does. If we could see it the way God sees it, then we would get it. And we would live our lives differently. God wants to change our values and our perspectives and our paradigm in life.

Heaven for Spring Break

Here is what I want you to consider. Pretend this. Let’s pretend that for spring break, this last week, you did not go on a mission trip or to see relatives. Let’s pretend that you got on a bus and it got lost, and I mean really lost, and you went to heaven for a week. It would be a cross-cultural experience,

wouldn't it? Oh yeah, it would. You would probably have to change some of your language and the Irish would lose two-thirds of their vocabulary. It would change the way you look at life. It would change the way you interact with other people. You would be off balance. You go to heaven for spring break and you get into it for seven days so that culturally speaking you are starting to work, to live, and to act like one of the natives there.

Let's just pretend that you saw the streets were literally paved with gold. Let's say it is not a figurative thing but the streets are paved with gold. Everywhere you look, every major avenue and every back alley is gold. You would come home from a long day of meeting friends and having an enjoyable time. What would you do when you got home? You would stomp your feet and say – 'Oh man, I have gold all in the wedges of my shoes.' You would take your shoes off and pound them to get the gold out. There might be a nugget stuck in there and you would get a pencil and drive it out before you walked in because you would not want to come inside with all stuck on your shoes. Right?

Maybe you were running down a street and you fell down. Don't you hate it when you fall down and the gold gets stuck in your wounds there. I wonder if this will get infected – gold in the blood stream?

Then after a week in heaven, you come back here and you look around and saw all these people and you are starting to realize that gold is asphalt in heaven. You come to earth and you see people lie and cheat and re-arrange their entire lives and sacrifice their dignity for asphalt. For stuff that you were trying to get out of your pants while you were on your spring break trip. Wouldn't that change everything, the way you see a lot of life?

Here is why it is so important that you see gold as asphalt. God wants to trust you with a lot more and bigger and better things. God wants to trust you with more than asphalt – I mean gold. Here is what I mean by that. Look at the passage now and just inject the idea that gold is asphalt / asphalt is gold and I want you to see the values that Jesus has towards this stuff because we have our world turned upside down and inside out.

Look at verse 1.

1. It is a Little Thing

Luke 16:10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much."

Jesus is saying – Look, I have been to heaven and it was for more than a week. I was there for my entire pre-existent life. Asphalt is just gravel with some kind of toxic syrup mixed into it and you guys are living

your lives around this stuff. Stop it! I want to trust you with something more than asphalt. Look at what you do with this. – You would do that, wouldn't you – if you went to heaven for a week and came back and saw people making ethical decisions that had consequences to their souls and to their intimacy with God and other people because of asphalt. What would you do? You would talk a lot about it, wouldn't you?

One out of every eight verses in the Bible talks about asphalt somehow. There are thirty-seven parables; one-third of the parables talks about Gold is Asphalt and Asphalt is Gold. Guys get this right because if you get this right, you are going to live a great life and then I can trust you with more and better stuff. It is just little stuff.

When I was working the student ministry and we would have our high school kids working with our junior high kids, I used to do this thing. I would give the high school kids a box of doughnuts, Mrs. J's doughnuts and these are great doughnuts. I would give them a box of twelve and say – I want you to take these doughnuts to the next event upstairs in the Attic. Don't any of them. They are for the junior high kids. – I would just watch them, kind of spy on them. I would check the table before the kids got up there to see if there were still twelve doughnuts there. If there weren't, I would go and talk to the high school and say – Man, I can't even trust you with doughnuts. I want to trust you with leading a Bible study with impressionable eighth-graders. You can change their whole lives, maybe. But for a Mrs. J's doughnut? Come on, man, it is just a doughnut. I want to trust you with more.

That is what He is saying. It is all just Monopoly money. Let me trust you with the good stuff. So, be shrewd with it. Make the most out of it.

2. It is Dirty

It is not just little but it is dirty. Look at verse 11. Like this is supposed to be news to us – Asphalt is dirty.

Luke 16:11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth [some translations read: filthy lucre / unrighteous wealth], who will trust you with true riches? He is saying that asphalt is dirty, smelly, it stains and it sticks to your stuff. It is filthy lucre. If I cannot trust you with gravel, then I can't trust you with true riches.

One of the professors in one of the Boston universities, two months ago, came out and said that ninety percent of U.S. dollar bills have traces of cocaine on them. That is how pervasive it is. And look at how filthy money is with its potential. If the walls could talk What if a twenty dollar bill could speak? It would weep.

People give up their souls for the twenty dollar bill. A woman gave her body to a married man. He lost his marriage and she lost her innocence. Or, a bank teller gives away his integrity for a twenty dollar bill. Or, some man gets shot in a liquor store for just a cash register drawer full of asphalt.

Jesus does not say – Look, get away from the stuff. It is dirty. He does not say – Take a vow of poverty. Stay away from this stuff – He says, use it righteously. Sprinkle some kind of eternal heavenly dust on it and make it useful for something. Use it shrewdly. Make a ball out of this asphalt, pack it together, put a board on top of it and use it like a leverage to lift the world with it. You can do that; it is just asphalt. Use it shrewdly. Make the most of it.

3. It is borrowed

It is not just little and it is not just dirty, it is even borrowed. Look at verse 12.

Luke 16:12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

Well, if that doesn't beat all. Now we have this little, dirty stuff and it doesn't even belong to us.

Here is a pop quiz. How much wealth did Michael Jackson leave behind? – All of it.

Good for you guys. Do you think they are going to let people pack asphalt into these caskets and take it with them, like there is not enough in heaven already? Nah. You use it to make friends for eternity and they will welcome you there.

It occurred to me when I was driving around the other day and I saw our bus parked across the street. That is a beautiful bus. It has a dual air conditioner and you could hang meat in there in the summer time when that thing is running. Let me tell you the story about the bus. A number of years ago, a family came to us and they did not go to our church. Their kids went to our student ministry. The youth guy had just blown up two buses on the way back from camp. It was not his fault, those old ones were junk. This family said – Hey, we would like to buy you a bus. That big old honking bus, turbo diesel and the whole thing costs like \$50,000. That is a lot of bus for \$50,000. He said – Hey, I would like to buy you a bus.

Let me tell you something. As far as shrewd goes, let's stop and think about that. What do we do with that bus? It is such a fancy bus, and I like buses, okay -- it has become the junior / senior bus because they get to ride in it. There is no telling if the other buses will be air conditioned or heated like that bus. What happens to juniors and seniors when they go to retreats and camps? Their whole world can change. So I don't know the donor's name. I stay out of people's giving because it is helpful for me. They might even be here right now. Think of this. How many people's lives in a state of vulnerability their senior year

when they are trying to figure out who they are and how God made them, to go off to some camp or retreat and they ride that bus. It is because of that bus that they are able to get to that camp. These people are going to get greeted in heaven, aren't they? *I was going this way with my life and because of that camp or retreat, I am going this way. I started seeing things for the way they were. My head got straightened out and I started hanging everything straight. It just made sense. I started living my life like every day belonged to Jesus Christ and I want to please Him and serve Him and do everything I can. It all started with me stepping onto this bus.*

That is shrewd living, friends. That is a good investment. The guy used his position; he knew someone who sold buses and we bought it for cost. He gave us the money. That is shrewd living. That is good giving.

Here is the big picture. Look at verse 13.

Luke 16:13 No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money (Gravel).

Sigmund Freud writes in one of his books a fable about a man who is a sailor and is shipwrecked and he survives that wreck. He clings to a piece of lumber and floats to an island. Then he is captured by the natives. It is an interesting group of people because instead of throwing him into a pot and then eating him, or killing him right away, or making him a prisoner or slave, they make him king in this little story. He rules that island but every silver lining has a cloud. It turns out that after a year is up, he would be banished to this other island where he would die all alone, painfully of starvation. So the man finds this out in advance and he takes an assessment of the situation. He says: Okay, get the boats ready. He started shipping people over to this other island for them to plant and to hoe and to plant crops and to have a harvest over there. He then started thinking even further ahead and said: I want to build a big old house over there for me. They built him a big house. Then he realized he had become quite fond of a number of people over there. So they built guest houses for them. When the year was up, instead of being banished to an island where he would die alone, painfully of starvation, he retired in great splendor.

That sounds like a pretty shrewd individual. That sounds like a pretty good parable of someone who is thinking far ahead, somebody who is leveraging his position so that he would be greeted for eternity.

That is a great story. That is a story that Jesus would tell. He would want us to understand that it is not enough to be good to be a follower of Christ. It is not enough to be dedicated as a follower of Christ. We have to be shrewd in our following of Christ.

Homework

Here is some homework for you. You have eight days to do this homework assignment. I want you to take some asphalt that you own, that is being lent to you. It is not much. It is little and it is dirty and it is not even yours. But I want you to take some of that asphalt and I want you to leverage it to talk to someone about coming to church on Easter. Just use it to maybe have a conversation with someone and give them one of these cards (in the bulletin).

Here is what I am going to do. I was thinking of this two days ago when we were downtown. I am going to rent an aerator – these machines that punch holes in the ground so that the grass grows better. You can rent one for a weekend. Next weekend, I am renting an aerator and I am going door-to-door this week and tell everybody that I am renting an aerator for the whole neighborhood. I am buying. It seems like that is the only time I get to see a lot of my neighbors is while doing yard work on the weekends. But I am the guy who is bringing the aerator next weekend. That makes me king. I am going to hope that after all the years of living on this street and my wife being block captain and all that sort of thing, that we could use that to have a conversation, to leverage the \$72.95 so that I can have a conversation and I could give out a card [the invitation].

What are you going to do? Do something. Eight days, okay. Let's pray with that end and we will have an offertory. We are taking up some asphalt and see what God can make of it, okay?

Dear heavenly Father,

We are tremendously grateful for you that you give us positions in life, sometimes it is the lowest person on the totem pole and we can use that position in a leveraged way so that we can make the most of it. Lord, we offer back to you the little dirty, borrowed stuff. We give to the big portfolio here as an investment called Grace Covenant Church to make the most out of every penny.

Lord, would you give us some kind of insight as to how we can use some of our possessions you have lent to us, maybe our position in life, in the next eight days to have a conversation and invite someone to our Resurrection Sunday in just two weeks.

God, we are grateful and I pray, God, that we would be faithful and trustworthy with this little, dirty, borrowed stuff so that You could trust us with the very important eternal things. We pray this with great expectation.

And all God's people said – Amen.