

## **Money and the Heart** **Luke 16:14-31**

We are in the second half of Luke chapter 16 this morning, which is a chapter that contains some of Jesus' teachings about money. Like last week, we have another passage that is difficult to interpret, probably because Luke only includes a small amount of the conversation and teaching that actually took place. I think I kind of understand the flow of thinking that ties it together and I'm going to try to explain that the best I can, but the main point of the passage is clear.

How do you know if God is pleased with what you're doing with the money he's entrusted to you? As long as you give an offering to the church, is that enough? What if you also give to the Benevolent Fund each month? Is that what God is looking for? Checking to see if we've paid our dues? What does God care about most when it comes to how we use our money?

In the first half of Luke 16, Jesus just finished teaching his disciples about how to view and handle their money. They needed to have a shift in their thinking so that they viewed their money and possessions as belonging ultimately to God, that he had entrusted it to them to be good stewards with it for building his Kingdom. They were to be shrewd with the money and possessions God had given so that they could influence people for the Kingdom of heaven. The way that they handled their wealth here on earth would have a direct influence on what they would be entrusted with in heaven.

So that was for his disciples, and now, in the second half of this chapter, we see him turn his attention to the Pharisees. The last thing he spoke to his disciples was: *"No servant can serve two masters, for 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 God and money."* Apparently that struck a chord with the Pharisees, because at that point they started to publicly shame and ridicule Jesus, and that's where we pick things up in our passage for today.

This is a confrontational passage where Jesus exposes some deep-rooted sin in their lives and we can use this to evaluate our own lives to see if where we're at is pleasing to the Lord.

Read Luke 16:14-15.

*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

So they ridiculed him for his teaching about money and I think in particular his statement that they couldn't serve God and money, because I'm pretty sure they thought they could. The Pharisees were wealthy landowners and had a lot of money, but they were also religious and thought they were in good standing with God, and part of that was because they had money. According to Leon Morris: *"They see their money as evidence of the blessing of God on their activities and thus of their righteousness."* I'm assuming they followed the law when it came to giving a tithe to the priests and giving offerings for the needy. That was enough to make them feel justified before God in what they did with their money. But the truth was, as Luke points out, that they were "lovers of money." And Jesus knew the whole story. They had a heart problem and what they did with their money revealed that.

Even though on the outside it looked like they were righteous and obedient to the Law, on the inside they were full of hypocrisy and sin. By obeying the law on the outside, Jesus said they were justifying themselves before men, but God knew what was going on in their hearts and it was an abomination in his sight. God knew that their tithing was only about fulfilling a legalistic requirement, and he knew that they gave to the poor in order to receive praise from others. So even though they looked like they fulfilled the law on the outside, they had a heart problem. Jesus said in Matthew 23:23: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."* They did what they had to do to justify themselves, but they had no mercy, compassion, and justice for the poor and their use of money revealed that – they had a heart problem. Lovers of money, not of God.

They paid their dues, and that's all that mattered to them. They thought they were fulfilling the requirements of the law, but Jesus starts to point out they weren't as we continue in the next few verses.

Read Luke 16:16-17.

*“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. <sup>17</sup> But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.*

What’s he saying here? I think what he’s saying is that things were changing – the good news of the kingdom of God was being preached and many were flocking to it – the Messiah had come to fulfill the Law and Prophets and salvation would be through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus. He would soon pay the penalty for sin and meet all the righteous requirements of the Law for those who transgressed it and put their faith in him. But that didn’t mean the Law was gone, it was just fulfilled in Christ, and all the ways the Pharisees were violating the Law were known and condemned by God. Their neglect of justice and mercy for the poor was standing in condemnation against them.

The next thing I think Jesus does is gives an example of their guilt in their practice of divorce. The attitude among the Pharisees at that time was that they could divorce their wife for any and every reason and they justified it by saying that in the law, divorce was permitted. But Jesus points out what the law actually said.

Read Luke 16:18.

*Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.*

They thought they were justified by the law, but in fact they were condemned as being guilty of adultery because of their practice of divorce for any and every reason. And now Jesus goes on to expose how they were guilty of breaking the law with how they handled money by telling them a parable of a rich man. The rich man represents the Pharisees.

Read Luke 16:19-21.

*“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

Let’s stop there and identify the problem both with the rich man and the Pharisees. The problem was not that he had wealth. It wasn’t just that he had fancy clothes and was feasting every day. Jesus gives those details to show the

contrast between him and Lazarus and the stark reality that with all his riches he didn't so much as give the table scraps to Lazarus. The problem was his heart – he was so self-absorbed that he didn't care about the suffering people right beneath his feet. Lazarus only needed table scraps to survive – garbage – the stuff that gets thrown away. But he didn't even get that! The rich man may have given his tithe to the priests and his offering for the poor to fulfill his religious requirements and get a pat on the back, but there wasn't an ounce of compassion or care in his heart. And his use of money revealed that.

The parable continues...

Read Luke 16:22-31.

*<sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' <sup>27</sup> And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' <sup>30</sup> And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"*

So as the story goes, both men died and the rich man went to Hades, which in this story is the equivalent of hell, and the poor man went to heaven. The rich man was in misery because he never repented of his sins, and his wickedness was demonstrated in this story by his use of money. He only cared about his own luxurious living and cared nothing about the poor. His heart was evil and God was not in it, therefore he received his just condemnation.

When he came to that realization after his death, he first begged for some relief, and when that was refused he then begged to have Lazarus go to his brothers to

call them to repent because he knew they were just as wicked as he was. But Abraham told him that even if someone rose from the dead to tell them to repent, they would not be convinced, which is clearly a reference to how the Pharisees would still reject Christ, even after he raised from the dead. They would reject him for the same reason they would ignore the poor and pursue a self-indulgent lifestyle – their hearts were spiritually dead and wicked.

This parable would have been a strong confrontation to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and exposed the evil in their hearts by the way they handled their money. They weren't helping the poor or showing compassion, they were just paying their dues.

Now what does this have to do with we who are Christians and seeking to follow Jesus? I think for us, even though we may not be spiritually dead like the Pharisees, we can still easily fall into the same sinful tendencies when it comes to what we do with our money. We need to examine our hearts to see if we have a Pharisaical view of money. Do we give a token offering to church to try to justify ourselves before God but then totally miss the heart of God and what he would want us to do with our money and use all the rest for our own earthly pleasures? Are we fooling ourselves into thinking we're fine with how we use our money even if we are neglecting the needs around us?

A couple verses came to mind that are addressed to Christians like us:

- 1 John 3:17: "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"
- James 2:15-17: "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,<sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?<sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

What we do with our money when there is someone in need right in front of our eyes, is an indication of what's going on in our hearts. If we truly belong to Christ and have been made alive by his Spirit, there will be compassion and mercy. In the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, those who had compassion and helped the needy were welcomed into God's kingdom, but those who ignored them went to eternal judgment.

What do these things reveal about your heart? Do you respond with compassion and open hands to help a brother or sister in need? Or do you tighten your grip on your money and keep it all to yourself?

This teaching should challenge us to examine ourselves and if it reveals some sinful tendencies like the Pharisees, we should confess that to God and repent. But I also want to say that it shouldn't condemn us unnecessarily, especially when we're facing financial hardship. When Paul was writing to the Corinthian church about helping those in need he said in 2 Corinthians 8:12-14: "*For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. <sup>13</sup> For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness <sup>14</sup> your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.*"

The biblical principle is to give out of your abundance, and when the abundance isn't there, you may not be able to give as much and that's ok. Don't condemn yourself. Paul says, "if the readiness is there." If the readiness is there to give, it shows you that your heart belongs to the Lord, even if you can't give at the time. The rich man in the story and the Pharisees Jesus was talking to weren't struggling to make ends meet. They had an abundance. And with that abundance they were ignoring the people who were in need because their hearts were evil.

If you have an abundance and someone comes to you with a need, God wants you to help them. Even when things are tight, chances are in our society, you can help with something – even help them contact the church or community resources for help. There are ways to help even if you can't give your own money at the time.

Let's take some time this morning in response to this parable to search our hearts and be honest before God.