



PRIORITIES

Luke 16:1-15

Unless you've been hiding under a rock for the past 20 years, we all know who Bill Gates is. The founder of Microsoft is one of the richest persons in the world.

When the stock market goes up or down his wealth rises and falls by billions of dollars and it probably doesn't bother him one way or another.

His life has been driven to make money. Imagine if he and Jesus were to sit down and talk about money. The first thing we would notice is that Jesus doesn't appear to have Gate's wealth.

What Gates doesn't know is that Jesus is old money. He's comfortable talking about money. He's not intimidated in the presence of one of the richest man in the world.

What would Jesus say to Bill Gates? He might start with the story we're looking at today in Luke 16:1-15. It's the story of a manager who was facing being fired because he mismanaged his boss's possessions.

Like many dishonest people, the manager thought he could get away with what he was doing because he didn't think the owner would check up on him.

But when the boss called for an audit he knew he was in deep trouble. He knew he would be fired. The problem was he didn't have enough money to retire and he was too out of shape to do manual labor and too proud to beg—so he came up with another plan. Here's what he did...

He called in each of the boss's debtors. Most likely these people were in arrears because of the incompetence of the manager. He made a deal with them—whatever they were behind they could mark, "Paid up to date." (see Lk. 16:5-7)

It was a clever plan—the boss wouldn't be angry because he thought they were paid up. The debtors were happy because they were up to date and they owed less. And, if he was fired the manager could turn to these people for help.

The boss's response was surprising—(v. 8) “The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.”

He commended his manager—not for his mismanagement—there was no excuse for that, or for his dishonesty—but for his shrewdness.

Wait a minute—what's the point of all this? Jesus certainly doesn't want Christians to be lousy managers. And we know he doesn't want us to be dishonest. So what is Jesus teaching?

Context here is important. This story is included in a series of stories told by Jesus beginning at 15:1 and concluding at 17:10.

You know the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the prodigal son, the rich man and Lazarus and, of course, this story about the shrewd manager—which we often skip because we don't get it.

All of these stories are about priorities. In this story our priority is to be smart in preparing for eternity. We are to be as driven toward God as this man was driven to watch out for himself. This is the point of the story.

Or, to say it another way in our imaginary conversation with Bill Gates, Jesus would say to him, “Bill, you should be as focused and forceful in knowing God as you have been in making money.”

Let me share five things here that are important for Christians:

1. We are managers, not owners of our stuff.

Luke 16:1-2(NIV) 1Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2So he 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.’

This is Jesus' basic point in all His teachings about money management. I said “money management” rather than “our money” because none of us owns anything. Yet we get very possessive especially about money.

It's a great privilege that God lets us use what He blesses us with. But when we begin to treat our money and possessions as if they are ours and ours alone, we become an ugly, stingy Christian.

There are many reasons God instructs us to tithe and give offerings and to help those less fortunate than us. One reason is to demonstrate that we are not bound by our things; that our money and our possessions do not control us.

Everything we have and are belongs to God. That should be a basic foundation of understanding for every Christian. We are the managers of what he blesses us with. God has the right to ask for an accounting of what we do with our money and stuff.

He expects us to report back to Him on a regular basis about how we are taking care of His possessions.

As His managers, God lets us live in His houses, drive His cars, and put His money into our bank accounts and investments.

Everything we have is His. His reputation is at stake if we are selfish with it or misuse it. He can take it back whenever He wants. Since we are managers and not owners of our stuff, then...

2. Be smart about what really matters.

Luke 16:3-4(NIV) 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— 4I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’

The shrewd manager used his position and power to make friends who would stick by him if he were fired. He was smart to figure out what mattered most—he needed friends.

Again, let’s not lose sight of the point of this story—Jesus is telling us to be smart about what really matters—our relationship with God and eternity and how that affects everything we do.

The shrewd manager figured out that what really mattered was having friends in case he was fired. Jesus is not telling us to be dishonest. His point is for us to figure out what is important.

Is it the stuff and things of this world, or is it preparing for eternity? When you understand that, then use the resources He has given you in ways that will pay off forever in heaven.

Give to God. Give your tithes and offerings to your church. Invest money in godly things. Use your money to help make more Christians.

Decide what is really important? A wealthy man was dying of an incurable disease. At his funeral his wife described how things became less important to him.

She illustrated it with his reading material. After he was diagnosed he no longer was interested in GQ magazine and the expensive clothes in it.

He lost interested in his luxury car magazines and financial and investment magazines as well as annual stockholder's reports. The only thing left that was of interest was his Bible.

3. Be trustworthy and honest.

Luke 16:10-12(NIV) 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. 11So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

Jesus has finished the story. Now he's commenting on it. The manager in Jesus' story was trusted with the owner's property and he blew it. He was dishonest and self-serving.

We are trusted by God with money, homes, cars, jobs etc. He trusts you with what is His. He trusts you to take your job seriously and do it well.

He trusts you to use your salary wisely. He trusts you with possessions; do you know they are His? Out of your salary He trusts you to tithe. He trusts you to give in special ways through your church.

One of the things I learned from my years in business is that potential doesn't mean much. It is performance that counts. When hiring someone, the smart businessman checks out what they have done in the past.

What they've done in the past is the best measure of what they will do in the future. Have you been trustworthy with what God has entrusted you? What it boils down to is that you must...

4. Choose your boss.

(This is key verse)

Luke 16:13 (NIV) 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.

I'm sure you recognize this famous quote from Jesus. He said the same thing in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:24).

It couldn't be clearer. It is direct, and blunt. It doesn't require much explanation. There can only be one master in your life. It could be anything: your job, sex, power, sports, politics, money, God, or something else. But you've got to make up your mind.

Evangelist E. Stanley Jones states it clearly, "If you don't make up your mind, then your unmade mind will unmake you. Here is the place where there must be no dallying. For any dallying will be the Trojan horse that will get on the inside and open the gates to the enemy. God can do anything for the man who has made up his mind; he can do little or nothing for the double-minded."

Jesus is talking about money here, so he lays it right on the line—Either God is your God, or money is your god. One or the other is going to be your boss—it's going to control you.

It would be interesting to find out what others think about us. What would happen if you asked 20 people you know best, "Which is more important in my life—God or money?" You might be shocked at what you learn.

Obviously Jesus is telling us that the best way to manage money is to make God priority in our life. Don't let money be your God.

Don't ever let money be the most important thing in your life. Don't ever let your most important decisions be primarily money decisions. Learn to...

5. Value what God values.

Luke 16:14-15(NIV) 14The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. 15He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

The Pharisees were the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They heard Jesus and sneered at Him. They believed they were smarter and better, and Jesus didn't have a clue.

They missed the whole point. Jesus operated on a totally different value system. The Pharisees had no problem separating their religious life from their secular life.

In their religious life they were Pharisees with certain beliefs and practices that they believed assured them of right standing with God. Their secular life was quite separate and it was okay to be lovers of money. This is how they justified themselves.

Here's the difference: Jesus cared about what God thought. The Pharisees cared about money. Jesus loved God. The Pharisees loved what money could buy. What our lives all come down to is what we value the most.

In our world all the price tags have been switched. The unimportant things have high prices but are not worth it. The important things have been cheapened.

Values like godliness, honesty, love for people and honest loyalty to Jesus Christ are the most valuable possessions in the world, but our world has mistakenly tagged them as cheap.

Don't make that mistake.

Application:

The question is, 'What is your priority; God or the things of the world? If your happiness depends on money and things, your priority is not God. Whatever you trust for your happiness is your god. If someone looked at your checkbook, what would it show?