

Faithful in a Little, Faithful in Much  
Luke 16:1-18  
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Read Luke 16:1-18

*“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:4b)*

### **Introduction - St. Patrick’s Confession**

Maewyn Succat was born around 386 AD in Britain to a Christian family; his father was a deacon, his grandfather was a priest. At age 16, he was captured by pirates and taken to Ireland to work as a slave tending sheep. Very poorly treated and humiliated, he escaped after six years and made his way back home. He had dreams, though, of the Irish begging him to come back, so he eventually returned as a missionary. He established over 200 churches and baptized over 100,000 people. Of course, we know him better as Patrick, eventually St. Patrick, and as far as the legends surrounding him, he did teach the Trinity using a shamrock as a visual but he didn’t drive the snakes out of Ireland. He essentially converted a whole nation to Christianity. It is truly sad that people celebrate him only by dressing in green and drinking a lot of beer.

His book, *Confessions*, was both his biography and his defense against the charges that he was poorly educated and that he went to Ireland for personal gain. Here is one excerpt:

“When I baptized so many thousands of people, did I perhaps expect from any of them as much as half a scruple? Tell me, and I will restore it to you. Or when the Lord ordained clerics everywhere through my unworthy person and I conferred the ministry upon them free, if I asked any of them as much as the price of my shoes, speak against me and I will return it to you. On the contrary, I spent money for you that they might receive me; and I went to you and everywhere for your sake in many dangers, even to the farthest districts, beyond which there lived nobody and where nobody had ever come to baptize, or to ordain clergy, or to confirm the people. With the grace of the Lord, I did everything lovingly and gladly for your salvation.”<sup>1</sup>

Our Scripture passage today is one mostly about money and how it is to be used by believers, especially Christian leaders. Like Patrick’s statement that he did “everything lovingly and gladly for (other’s) salvation” and only used money to aid in furthering the gospel, Jesus calls us to use money in a way that advances His kingdom. The religious leaders of the day were lovers of money, so Jesus rebuked them and taught His disciples a more noble way. Let’s move into the text, where the first nine verses has been called the most difficult parable in the Gospel of Luke!

### **I. Money Can Be Used to Make Friends (vv. 1-9)**

*<sup>1</sup> He also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. <sup>2</sup> And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ <sup>3</sup> And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup> I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’ <sup>5</sup> So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ <sup>6</sup> He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ <sup>7</sup> Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him,*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Confession of St. Patrick*, found at <https://catholicplanet.com/ebooks/Confession-of-St-Patrick.pdf>.

*'Take your bill, and write eighty.'*<sup>8</sup> *The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.*

In this parable, the master has heard that his manager, his household steward, is mismanaging his possessions, either through skimming money for himself or just wasteful spending. The Greek word for “wasting” in verse 1 (*diaskopizon*) is the same word that was used in the last chapter to describe the prodigal son’s wasting/squandering his father’s inheritance.<sup>2</sup> The rich man has him turn in his accounts, which I guess is like ordering an audit, so that he can see for himself that the manager has embezzled the money. But apparently, he has not immediately fired him so there is a window of time for the man to leverage his position to set himself up for the time after his employment. He knew he couldn’t handle manual labor (v. 3 mentions not being strong enough to dig); he was a “white-collar worker” who knew he couldn’t make the transition to “blue collar work” very well. And unlike the Temptations, he was too proud to beg for money. So he would just have to use his position while he could to make friends who would “owe him” after he was out of a job.

So he cut one guy’s bill in half and another’s by 20%. At first glance, it seems that he is wasting the master’s possessions and mishandling his management even more. But the commentaries I read said that he was merely taking his commission out of the equation; he was saving the debtors his cut of the transaction. He was sacrificing short-term gain for long-term favor with the creditors. How did the master react to this turn of events? Verse 8 – he commended him, he praised his shrewdness. “He clearly is not praising him for his *integrity* but for his *ingenuity*.”<sup>3</sup> Even if he was not pleased by him, he was impressed by him.

This is such a strange story because most of the master/worker stories that Jesus tells have the emphasis on the worker being faithful in the master’s absence. But here the manager continues to go behind the back of the master *and he gets commended for it!* How is that at all consistent with Jesus’ usual emphasis? It’s not, because Jesus was making different points here. We need to keep in mind that parables are intended to make one main point, and that we should not expect every detail to be instructive. Don’t misunderstand this and think that Jesus was encouraging unethical work and greed when He was encouraging thinking ahead and leveraging your present for your future.

Jesus was not saying that we should try to find a way to hurt our companies that brings us friends or commit fraud as long as we personally benefit. He was simply giving an example of someone who found a clever way to make friends. He was telling us that we need to think strategically. Take a cue from savvy unbelievers and use material possessions to make friends for the future, which for Christians means eternity (vv. 8-9). Believers tend to be a little naïve, a little simple. That’s not always a bad thing, but Jesus was saying that we could learn a thing or two from the way unbelievers scheme and work things to their advantage. Not that we’re going to have the same goals, Jesus doesn’t want us to cheat at work and manipulate our customers. He is simply saying that when you think of how you use your money, think strategically. Think beyond how you will provide for yourself and your family. The excess that you have can be used generously.

At the most basic reading of verse 9 (“*make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings*”), it sounds something like “buy

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<sup>2</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 419.

<sup>3</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Luke 14-24: On the Road to Jerusalem* (Glasgow: Christian Focus, 2021), p. 40.

yourself some friends who can help you make it into heaven.” That is truly a strange idea when compared with the rest of Scripture. Clearly, that’s not how salvation and heaven work; no one can buy their way in or have their friends sneak them in or anything like that. I think what Jesus was getting at was that if we use our money for other’s benefits, when we get to heaven, we’ll be welcomed in, maybe even thanked, for the ways that we built God’s kingdom. When you give money to a church plant, you may meet those who were brought to faith in that church. When you helped fund Bible translation efforts, you might meet some native of a tribe who was the beneficiary of that translation and followed Jesus after hearing the Bible read in his native tongue. When you gave that teenage girl \$200 to go on a mission trip, those who were impacted by her efforts may thank you for your part in funding her trip. It’s a different way of saying “store up treasures in heaven” that we’ve seen several times now in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus wants us to ask, “How can I maximize my money for eternity?”

Jesus continued to make practical applications in the next four verses, with the theme being that

## **II. Money is a Test of Faithfulness (vv. 10-13)**

*<sup>10</sup> One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. <sup>11</sup> If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? <sup>13</sup> 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.”*

The Greek word, *mammon*, is used three times in these verses – in verses 9 and 11 it’s the word translated “wealth” in the phrase “unrighteous wealth” and in verse 13 it’s the last word translated “money” – “*You cannot serve God and mammon.*” Mammon means all of our wealth, including investments, cash, possessions, all of it. Unrighteous wealth doesn’t necessarily mean that it is money obtained unethically or illegally. Other translations say “worldly wealth.” In other words it’s just money, it’s not true wealth - spiritual wealth.

When I was still in elementary school, I remember my Dad gave my two brothers and me each \$50 to spend on whatever we wanted, which was a lot of money at the time and at our age. It was a test of sorts to see where our hearts were. Would we spend it on ourselves? Would we save it? Would we spend some on anyone else? He knew that whatever we bought with that money would be a good indication of what we’d grow up spending our money on. I don’t think I passed that test because I spent that entire \$50 on music, on brand new vinyl records. I didn’t even consider saving it or giving some of it away; I just knew I was starting to love music and I wanted to build a record collection. My parents figured out quickly that I needed to learn about being a good steward of money, and they made sure my brothers and I took the Crown Ministries course before we got out of college so that we would know about good money practices that honor the Lord. I highly recommend any of you who struggle with managing money read Crown Ministries materials.

Sometimes I hear church members say things like, “If I inherit a bunch of money, I will give a huge chunk to the church.” Or “If I won the lottery, we could buy the church a great building and fund a bunch of ministry.” And my first thought is, “If you’re not giving sacrificially with the money you have now, what makes me think that you’d give a lot if you came into a huge windfall?” Those who are unfaithful with little are not likely to be faithful with great amounts. We have emphasized to our children that as they’ve gotten summer jobs in high school and college, that we expect them to tithe on whatever they make. Which is hard to do as a teenager or a young 20-something. You only make minimum wage or barely above it, then you see how much is taken out in taxes, AND then to give 10% to the church? We don’t do it so that my salary will get paid or so that no one can criticize

our children. We do it because that is being faithful in the small things, and we know that if they are in the habit of giving from the beginning, that they are more likely to be lifelong tithers. The same goes for paying your taxes, putting away money in savings, keeping honest accounts at work – God is looking for those who are faithful in small things so that He can entrust them with larger things.

That principle applies to work and all kinds of other areas of life as well. You should work hard even when no one is watching or when the stakes are not very high, so that when you are elevated to a higher level you will be faithful there as well. I've had speaking opportunities in front of large groups and in front of 5 kids. If I blew off the talk in front of 5 kids and didn't prepare and do a good job, why would God entrust me with a larger speaking platform? Why would your boss promote you if you do sloppy work in your entry-level position? If you find yourself flipping burgers or mopping floors but dreaming of doing greater things, don't wait until you get there to work hard. Flip those burgers and mop those floors to the best of your ability, to the glory of God. Be faithful even in the small things.

Verse 13: no servant can serve two masters; choose God or mammon/possessions as your master. Even if you have two masters, you will hate one and love the other. So people who try to serve God and money will end up hating one of them, and guess which one it usually is? Most people will end up resenting God and His demands on them as they devote their lives to making as much money as they can. Pursuing money can cause us to ignore God, neglect our families, use people, act unethically, and all kinds of other destructive things. I don't know how much more plainly we can say it: You cannot love money if you want to follow Jesus. Money is God's test of your faithfulness. We all fall short somehow in this area, let us confess our lack of faithfulness and ask God to change our hearts and give us integrity.

For the last five verses, Jesus turned from addressing His disciples to addressing a different audience who had been overhearing His teaching, the Pharisees.

### **III. Money-Lovers Don't Respond Well to Jesus (vv. 14-18)**

*<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.*

The Pharisees ridiculed Jesus, they turned up their noses at Him and sneered at Him. They still thought that wealth and prosperity in this life were a sure sign that God was blessing them, so they loved money and enjoyed the prestige it gave them. They thought they could serve both God and money, but really they loved money and used serving God as a veneer. Jesus' words in verse 15 showed them exactly where they stood with God: God knew their hearts and was sickened by what He saw. You can fool everyone else and be praised by them, but God sees right through all of that; you can't fool Him. If there's one thing I don't want God thinking about what's in my heart, it's the word "abomination" – that's what Jesus said God thought of the Pharisees' hypocrisy.

What does verse 16 "*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*" mean? John was the first prophet of the new covenant, the forerunner of Jesus, who brought the good news of the kingdom. Jesus was careful to say in the next verse that the Law never is actually voided; He did not come to do away

with the Law but to fulfill it. The application to the Pharisees is that they were clinging to the old ways of doing things and had not figured out that Jesus was the new way. But all kinds of people around them understood that Jesus had brought the true kingdom of God and they wanted in!

To illustrate this understanding of the law, Jesus used just one example: divorce. When I first read verse 18, I thought that Luke was just throwing some random teachings together, but this does actually fit in the flow of Jesus' thought. The Pharisees had become very relaxed about divorce. They had no problem with a man divorcing his wife if he found issues with her, though a woman had very few reasons to divorce her husband. But Jesus wanted everyone to know that God's will is for marriage to be lifelong and that just as we should be good stewards and managers of God's money, we should also be good managers of our marriages and our families. I don't really have time to have a full discussion of the Bible's treatment of divorce, so let me just lay out three principles:

1) Christians should only marry other Christians, that is what being equally yoked and "marrying in the Lord" means. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 7 that if a Christian and a non-Christian are married, though, the Christian should not seek a divorce merely on those grounds. But if the non-Christian chooses to leave the Christian spouse, then the believer should let the other go, and then is free to remarry.

2) In Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, Jesus says that a legitimate reason to end a divorce is because of adultery. You don't have to divorce your spouse after adultery; you can forgive and rebuild your marriage; but you have a biblical right to divorce since they've broken the marriage covenant.

3) Here Jesus says that divorcing your spouse and marrying another is the same as committing adultery. Now, combining this with the other principles, we assume that He is saying that divorcing your spouse for an unbiblical reason, in other words, when he or she has not committed adultery or abandoned you. Then you are guilty of adultery if you remarry. But if you get divorced because your spouse cheated on you or abandoned you, you are free to remarry.

## **Conclusion**

Did you ever hear about the "Stanford Marshmallow Experiments" of the early 1970s? It was a psychological experiment where a group of children were led into a room where there were treats laid out on a table, either marshmallows, cookies or pretzels. The children were given the choice that they could either eat their treat immediately and that would be all they could get, or if they could wait fifteen minutes to eat it, they would be rewarded with a second treat. It was a study of deferred gratification, and some of the kids ate the snacks immediately. The ones who waited had to close their eyes and not look at the food, sing to themselves, or find some kind of way to take their minds off of the tempting treats. Fifteen years later, the leaders of that experiment followed up with the students and found that the children who were able to delay gratification in the study had better SAT scores, higher grades, better body mass indexes, and various other life outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

What's my point? This is another Scripture passage that reminds us how short this life is and how long eternity is. We will spend eternity in heaven, trillions of years. We spent a tiny amount of time here and now. Can we delay our gratification and not grab up all the money that we can, and spend it all on ourselves, buying everything our selfish little hearts want in this life? We ought to be able to see our life now as a time to position ourselves as best we can. If we cling to making our time now the best it can be, we betray our sense of eternity. Those who act as if this is the only world we get, either flat out deny that there is an afterlife (so go ahead and call Jesus a liar) or they're as sad as those elementary school kids who couldn't wait 15 minutes and immediately ate their snack.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://psychology.fandom.com/wiki/Stanford\\_marshmallow\\_experiment](https://psychology.fandom.com/wiki/Stanford_marshmallow_experiment)

When you get to heaven one day, will you be welcomed by people who are there because you invested God's money well? What decisions about money and possessions do you need to make differently to show that you are completely devoted to God and are not serving the god mammon?

I have two quote to close with – one from Martin Luther, the 16<sup>th</sup> century German Reformer, and Martin Luther King Jr, the 20<sup>th</sup> century civil rights leader. Martin Luther King Jr. first:

“We have bowed before the god of money only to learn that there are such things as love and friendship that money cannot buy and that in a world of possible depressions, stock market crashes, and bad business investments, money is a rather uncertain deity. These transitory gods are not able to save or bring happiness to the human heart. Only God is able. It is faith in Him that we must rediscover.”<sup>5</sup>

Martin Luther:

“Therefore we must use all these things upon earth in no other way that as a guest who travels through the land and comes to a hotel where he must lodge overnight. He takes only food and lodging from the host, and he says not that the property of the host belongs to him. Just so should we also treat our temporal possessions, as if they were not ours, and enjoy only so much of them as we need to nourish the body and then help our neighbors with the balance. Thus the life of the Christian is only a lodging for the night, since we have here no continuing city, but must journey on to heaven, where the Father is.”<sup>6</sup>

Keep your eyes on the prize, brothers and sisters in Christ! Eternity is where it's at. All that you sacrifice here on earth will be paid back many times over in heaven. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul? How does it help you to enjoy lavish riches and luxuries for 70 or 80 years when you risk spending a billion years regretting that? Live with the reality of eternity always before you, let it guide you and change you. Amen.

Benediction

1 Timothy 6:14-16 - “... (to) keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will display at the proper time – He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.”

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<sup>5</sup> Coretta Scott King, *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Newmarket, 1996), p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), chapter 72.