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## How to Handle Money

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TEXT: Luke 16:1-3 (ESV)

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. 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.' 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.

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Julie and I recently had a meeting with our financial planner, Tim, on how to best handle and invest our finances for the future. Now, in the past, we have found him to be wise and a man of integrity. So, we trust him and follow his recommendations. We know we need all the guidance we can get when it comes to managing our money. So, we're grateful for him and his instructions. But this person is not our only financial planner. There's another individual who actually talked a lot about money during his ministry, and we have learned along the way that he has plenty of valuable things to teach us about having and using money wisely. And his name is Jesus. In fact, we have him talking about money with his disciples in today's passage. He's teaching those who follow him about how to best use the money, possessions, and other resources that they have.

The teaching begins with a parable about a dishonest money manager. It appears that his job was overseeing an estate, as well as doing some bill collecting. His rich boss finds out, though, that this manager has been wasting his possessions, that he's dishonest. So, the master tells him he's fired. "Go fetch your accounting books, turn them in for an audit and be on your way. We are done." Now, as the rich master walks away, the manager asks himself, "What do I do now? I'm losing my job. I'm about to be

put out on the streets. What about my future? I'm not strong enough to dig ditches. And I'm too proud to beg." As he thinks about it, a light bulb goes off in his head. "I know what I'll do, so that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses, and I'll be taken care of." And he carries out this very shrewd and prudent plan. He calls in a couple of his master's debtors, big shot farmers with big time debts, and gives them a significant reduction on those debts by actually giving up his own commission. And he's probably inferring to them that, "Hey, I talked my boss into giving you a generous reduction on your bill." So, of course, they're thrilled and grateful. Now, the manager has won the goodwill of those debtors towards his master and most importantly, to himself. Now he'll be taken care of by these guys. Who knows? Maybe even be hired by one of them. Jesus' parable ends rather strangely. He goes on to say, "And the master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness." Why the commendation, do you suppose? It wasn't for his dishonesty, no, but for his foresight, using his financial expertise to make friends for himself and thus be taken care of in the future. Jesus then comments, "For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light," meaning disciples of Jesus.

So, what in the world is Jesus teaching us here? Is he telling us to be dishonest in our dealings with others? Absolutely not. "Thou shalt not steal" still applies in his kingdom. No, Jesus is not commanding dishonesty in this parable. He's commending the wise and shrewd use of money with our future in mind, the big picture eternity. Following this strange little parable, Jesus gives us three applications for it. He says, "I tell you, when it comes to managing money and the other resources God has entrusted to work with, here are three things to put to work in your life. First, be generous with it. Use it for the care and welfare of others." He says, "Use what God has given you to gain new friends for yourself." He's talking about those who are needy. Who need our help, our generosity, "so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." Now, Jesus is not talking about buying your way into Heaven. We know a person can enter Heaven only by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ and what He's done for us. But Jesus is talking about hearing a "Well done, good and faithful servant," from God, and perhaps even from the lips of those who are touched by your generosity as you tangibly reach out to them in Christ's name with your finances.

Next thing he says is be trustworthy. Be trustworthy with what God has given you to manage. Money management that is faithful to God, Jesus says, will lead to spiritual rewards. Listen to his words again. "So if you have not been trustworthy in handling

world wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" He means the treasures of the Kingdom of God. And he says, and if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, meaning God's property, who will give you property of your own? He's talking spiritual, heavenly rewards.

Finally, Jesus says, "Be careful. Don't wind up serving money. Don't let it become a god in your life. That's idolatry. You can't serve and love both God and money. So don't even try. No servant," Jesus says, "can serve two masters at the same time. It just will not work." So, he's saying, "Choose God as your master and keep money in its proper place. Serve the giver and not the gift."

Now, money isn't the root of all evil, but loving money is, Scripture says. And it can lead you away from loving the one true God who has said, "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me." Satan loves to use temptation like money to get us away from worshiping God. Each one of us then needs to be constantly asking ourselves and perhaps even turning to someone who knows us well enough and loves us enough to tell us the truth, these questions: am I handling my money or is my money handling me? Or the question: who or what am I living for and serving ultimately? And do my spending and priorities give evidence that I love God, that he's at the center of my life? It's all too easy to get off track and fool ourselves in regard to this subject.

Christian author Kyle Eidelman addresses this in his book *God's at War*. He writes,

Money has grown to be so dominant in our culture that it's difficult for us to stand far enough back to get a perspective. No matter what we may say, many of us live as if the pursuit of wealth is the real goal of life. We pay lip service to the idea that money isn't that important, but how we spend our time and what we pursue seem to reveal our true belief.

And money is a tough and demanding taskmaster when it takes over a life – it'll ruin us as you pursue it at the expense of family relationships and personal values and your relationship with God. So, Jesus says, "Choose God to be at the center of your life."

Why? Because he's the one true God in whom we live and move and have our being. As the designer, he knows what makes our lives work best. And he's a generous and faithful master, not stingy and uncaring towards us. He knows us and values us, created us in his image. He loves us so much that he sent his son Jesus to the cross to redeem you and make you his own. So, serve him and not the temporary riches and pleasures of this world.

There are two profound truths I see here for us to apply to our lives. First, we need to keep in mind that we're the managers, not the owners, of what we have. That is so easy for us to forget. God has provided us with resources to manage for His glory and honor. And as a hymn so accurately says, "All that we have is thine alone. A trust, O Lord, from thee." So, you and I have been entrusted with all that we have: our money, our possessions, our time, our abilities. You could say that it's on loan to us from God. So, this truth calls for a change of attitude towards how we handle our money. We manage it for God and his purposes.

I'm reminded of a story I came across about a man who was nearing retirement back in 2009. He had a modest income and built a modest retirement account to retire on. He, like a lot of people, though, suffered a huge financial hit on his retirement account when the economy tanked that year, you remember. When his adult son asked him how he was feeling about losing so much of his money? He just smiled at him and said, "Well, it wasn't mine to begin with." And then he quoted a Bible verse from Philippians, "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus." That's what Jesus is pointing us towards, that attitude. And that's a tough one to hang on to. We think that we've earned what we have and that it's ours. Sometimes, though, I think it's important for us to try the little exercise of taking a day and intentionally go through it – telling yourself and recognizing that everything is God's. That you're getting out of God's bed in the morning and walking into God's bathroom and turning on God's shower and then putting on God's clothes and eating God's cereal and drinking God's coffee and getting into God's car and heading to God's work.

Now, the second truth we're given that's important here as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to be trustworthy in how we manage these things God is given. We wisely and generously use our resources to gain new friends. He's saying here when he talks about gaining new friends, he's saying "Be God's faithful manager by serving others with your resources, always keeping an eternal perspective as you do so." You see, your generosity could lead them to eternal dwellings, Jesus says, salvation in Christ, Heaven. Our giving to various ministries like the local church or agencies that meet human needs in Christ's name or seminaries or missionary organizations, our giving to these things not only says to God, "I love you, Lord," it also says to the needy world that needs Jesus Christ, "I love you and care about you, and so does our God." It can actually bring others to Jesus and the eternal life he came to give.

So, I'm going to end this message today with a Christian song that I believe really captures the gist of today's passage. It's entitled *Thank you*.