

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Law and the Kingdom of God

Luke 16:14-18

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Scripture

Luke 16 primarily deals with the topic of possessions. There are three sections in the chapter. The first section is the parable of the dishonest manager (16:1-13). Jesus responds to the ridicule of the Pharisees in the second section (16:14-18). And the third section is about the rich man and Lazarus to show that God is concerned not just about the use of possessions but how the poor are treated (16:19-31).

Today we are going to study the second section. It is a difficult passage to understand. Darrell Bock says of Luke 16:14-18, "This short unit forms a bridge between the parable of the unrighteous steward (Luke 16:1-13) and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31). The logic of the thought is difficult and has been the object of much discussion."¹ So, though it is difficult, we shall seek to explain the text.

Let's read about the law and the kingdom of God in Luke 16:14-18:

¹⁴The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. ¹⁵And 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.

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. ¹⁷But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

¹⁸"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman di-

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51-24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1344.

forced from her husband commits adultery.” (Luke 16:14-18)

Introduction

On December 6, 1865, just months after the Civil War ended, the thirteenth amendment outlawing slavery was ratified and became the law of the land. But that didn't mean every state approved the ratification of the amendment. Did you know that Mississippi's state legislature did not immediately approve the ratification of the amendment? One hundred and thirty years passed before Mississippi took action. By 1995 Mississippi was the only state in the Union that had not approved the ratification of the thirteenth amendment.

Finally, on Thursday, February 16, 1995, the Mississippi Senate voted unanimously to outlaw slavery by approving the ratification of the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution.

Senator Hillman Frazier, a member of Mississippi's Legislative Black Caucus, said, "I think it's very important for us to show the world that we have put the past behind us."

Just as there was resistance in some states ratifying an end to slavery in the United States, so there is resistance in some people accepting God's kingdom.²

Although this is true in our day, it was also true of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They resisted Jesus' teaching about the arrival of the kingdom of God. In fact, they ridiculed Jesus for his teaching. But Jesus, as he always did, responded to them.

Lesson

The analysis of the response of Jesus to the Pharisees' ridicule in Luke 16:14-18 teaches us about their misunderstand-

² Craig Brian Larson, *750 Engaging Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers & Writers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 291.

ing of possessions, the kingdom of God, and the law.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Ridicule of the Pharisees (16:14)
2. The Response of Jesus (16:15-18)

I. **The Ridicule of the Pharisees (16:14)**

First, let's look at the ridicule of the Pharisees.

In the early 1990s when President George Bush had fiery John Sununu as his chief of staff in the White House, Sununu was once asked by a reporter if his job was difficult. He answered a quick and deliberate "No." The reporter thought that Sununu had misunderstood the question, so he asked again. And got the same reply.

The chief of staff explained, "I have only one constituent." He knew his job was to please the President.³

I don't know if John Sununu is a Christian. But he understood what Jesus had taught his disciples in Luke 16:13, "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." Jesus wanted his disciples to understand the truth that love of money will displace one's love for God.

Although Jesus had taught this truth to his disciples, the Pharisees also heard his teaching. Luke said in verse 14 that **the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.**

The Pharisees apparently regarded **money** as their rightful reward for their faithful observance of the law. They believed that had God blessed them with financial abundance because of their obedience to God's law. Norval Geldenhuys

³ Knute Larson, *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, vol. 9, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 22-23.

says, “The covetousness of the Pharisees is independently attested, and they regarded their wealth as a special blessing for their carefulness in observing the Law. Hence their contempt for teaching which declared that there is danger in wealth and that as a rule it promotes unrighteousness.”⁴

So, when Jesus came along and he was poor, his disciples were poor, and he warned of the danger of wealth, the Pharisees did not believe that God’s blessing was upon him.

The Pharisees disagreed with Jesus that they had to make a choice about whom to serve. They believed that God was blessing them with finances because of their devotion to God. But, in spite of their ridicule of Jesus, they **were** in fact **lovers of money**. Their real master was money and not God.

Phil Ryken asks the questions, “Which master are you serving? Is Jesus Christ the master of your heart, or are you still slaving away for money?” And then he suggests several warning signs that help us see that we are more in love with money than we are with God. See if any of these are true of you:

when we are anxious about our finances, not trusting God to provide for our needs today and tomorrow, we are in love with money and its power to make us feel more secure;

when our lives are so full of work that we have to say “no” to Christian service, we are in love with money and have given it mastery over our schedule;

when we find our thoughts returning again and again to something we are hoping to buy, we are in love with money and its power to get us what we think we want;

when we make employment decisions that are spiritually unwise for ourselves and our families, we are in love with money

⁴ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), f.n.

and our plans for getting more of it;

when we find ourselves wishing we had some material possession that God has given to someone else, we are in love with money and the status or convenience or pleasure it seems to bring;

when we spend more time complaining about what we do not have than rejoicing in what we do have, we are in love with money and depend on our possessions rather than on God to give us contentment and joy;

when it seems difficult or even impossible to give up something we want in order to give a full biblical tithe or to make a sacrificial gift to Christian work, we are more in love with money than we are with the gospel and what it can do to change the world.⁵

How do you respond to these warning signs? Is God your master? Or is money your master?

II. The Response of Jesus (16:15-18)

And second, let's notice the response of Jesus. Jesus actually gave a three-fold response.

A. *The Misunderstanding of Possessions (16:15)*

Jesus' first response has to do with the misunderstanding of possessions.

Jesus **said to the Pharisees, "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**

⁵ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 184.

of God” (16:15).

The Pharisees believed that the abundance of their possessions proved that God had blessed them. Therefore, they presented themselves to people as justified before God.

“But,” Jesus said, **“God knows your hearts.”** Norval Geldenhuys makes this comment, “But he knows their hearts and knows what motives are hidden behind their public practice of charity. The great question is not whether they are honored by men on account of their wealth and outward piety, but whether God esteems them.”⁶

The Pharisees tried to justify themselves by means of their financial success. We may do the same thing. Or, we may try to justify ourselves before others – and God – by means of our church attendance, or ministry activity, or financial giving, or any one of a number of religious activities.

But this is not how we are justified before God. What Jesus said to the Pharisees is true for us as well: God knows what is in our hearts. God knows that we are sinners and have broken his law. God knows that we are destined for hell. God knows that the only way to be saved is to repent of our sin and believe that Jesus paid the penalty for all our sin. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, in answer to Question 33 (“What is justification?”), says, “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”⁷

Money and possessions do not save us. Jesus saves us. And Jesus teaches that disciples serve God and not money.

When Dr. W. A. Criswell, pastor of the largest Southern Baptist church in the world at that time, was preaching in the North Shore Baptist Church in Chicago, he was entertained at

⁶ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 420.

⁷ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*, 3rd edition. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

the home of deacon James L. Kraft, who was superintendent of the Sunday school and founder of Kraft Foods. Kraft said that as a young man he had a desire to be the most famous manufacturer and salesman of cheese in the world. He planned on becoming rich and famous by making and selling cheese and began as a young fellow with a little buggy pulled by a pony named Paddy. After making his cheese, young Kraft would load his wagon and he and Paddy would drive down the streets of Chicago to sell the cheese. As the months passed, the young Kraft began to despair because he was not making any money, in spite of his long hours and hard work.

One day he pulled his pony to a stop and began to talk to him. He said, "Paddy, there is something wrong. We are not doing it right. I am afraid we have things turned around and our priorities are not where they ought to be. Maybe we ought to serve God and place him first in our lives." Kraft then drove home and made a covenant that for the rest of his life he would first serve God and then would work as God directed.

Many years after this, Dr. Criswell heard James Kraft say, "I would rather be a layman in the North Shore Baptist Church than to head the greatest corporation in America. My first job is serving Jesus."⁸ Can you say that today?

B. The Misunderstanding of the Kingdom (16:16)

Jesus' second response has to do with the misunderstanding of the kingdom.

Jesus went on to say in 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.**" The appearance of Jesus' cousin, **John** the baptizer, introduced the transition from the Old Testament to the New

⁸ Michael P. Green, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 331–332.

Testament. **John** began preaching **the good news of the kingdom of God**, and Jesus and his disciples continued to proclaim **the good news of the kingdom of God**.

The phrase that **everyone forces his way into it** (that is, the kingdom of God), is best understood as, “everyone is forcefully urged into it,” as the *ESV Bible* footnote has it. Jesus was forcefully urging people to hear and believe **the good news of the kingdom of God** so that they could enter it. Many irreligious people responded to Jesus’ good news, but the religious people of his day refused to believe Jesus. And by doing so they excluded themselves from the kingdom of God.

Singer and songwriter Bono once tried to explain the good news in an interview. He said, “The thing that keeps me on my knees is the difference between Grace and Karma.” When he was asked to explain the difference, Bono said,

At the center of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you. . . . Yet along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that. . . . Love interrupts . . . the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I’ve done a lot of stupid stuff. . . . It doesn’t excuse my mistakes, but I’m holding out for Grace. I’m holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don’t have to depend on my own religiosity.⁹

Religiosity has never and will never save anyone. Jesus came preaching **the good news of the kingdom of God**. He taught that anyone may enter the kingdom of God by repentance from sin and faith in him. It is just that simple.

C. The Misunderstanding of the Law (16:17-18)

Jesus’ third response has to do with the misunderstand-

⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 187.

ing of the law.

Jesus said in verse 17, **“But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.”** Although his advent introduced the arrival of the kingdom of God, that did not mean that God’s revelation of his law in the Old Testament was now set aside or rejected. The civil and ceremonial aspects of the law found their fulfillment in Jesus, while the moral law has ongoing and continuing validity.

And so Jesus gave an example of the ongoing validity of one of the moral laws, the law having to do with adultery. He said in verse 18, **“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”**

Jesus probably chose the law regarding adultery because it was one that the Pharisees were failing to keep. Norval Geldenhuys says, “These words are especially directed against those Pharisees who allowed divorce to the husbands on various kinds of trifling matters, but violated the right of the wife in such a manner that no right of divorce was granted her if she was unjustly or cruelly treated by her husband.”¹⁰

Leon Morris explains that some Pharisees “were very permissive, allowing men divorce on the most trivial grounds. Thus Hillel thought it enough if a wife spoiled her husband’s dinner and Akiba went so far as to permit divorce if the man found someone prettier than his wife.”¹¹

The Pharisees thought that they were pleasing God by keeping his law. But, in fact they were perverting God’s law and were displeasing him.

We do the same thing, don’t we. We decide what it means to obey God and his law. We determine how God’s law should be obeyed, and when we do that, we always distort it.

¹⁰ Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, 423.

¹¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 251.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the response of Jesus to the Pharisees' ridicule in Luke 16:14-18, we should do what is necessary to enter the kingdom of God.

That is why Jesus' message is such good news. It is a message for people who know that they are not keeping God's law. It is a message for people who know that they are failing miserably before God. But there is a way to be saved. God never lowers the standard of his law. And so he has provided one who has paid the penalty for our sin. Bono said it well: "The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. It's not our own good works that get us through the gates of Heaven."¹²

No, our good works are never sufficient to get us into the kingdom of God. Instead, what gets us into the kingdom of God is the work that Jesus did in his life by his perfect obedience to the law of God and by his death on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. When we believe that good news, we are enabled to enter into the kingdom of God.

So, I ask you: do you believe that Jesus has paid the penalty for your sin? Do you believe that his obedience is credited to your account? Are you willing to turn from your sin? Are you willing to serve God alone?

If you put your trust in Jesus and turn from your sin, you will enter into the kingdom of God. If you have never done so, do so today! Amen.

¹² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 191.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Father, thank you for Jesus' teaching in this section of *The Gospel of Luke*. Help each one of us to have a right understanding of possessions, the kingdom of God, and the law.

Grant each one of us the gift of faith in Jesus and repentance from sin.

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!