

Luke 16:1-15 Giving: "A good deal"

Proposition: Giving frees us from the love of money, brings rewards now and eternally and builds character.

As we work our way through Dr Luke's meticulous account of Jesus' teaching and life we get to Luke 16 and what I think is one of the most cryptic teachings of Jesus, at least for me, it is not easy or clear immediately what it means, but. .. because the Lord said it, it must be important. As a church we have always endeavoured to take in the full counsel of His word, not just the easy parts, so would you stand with me as we read

Luke 16:1-8 (Contemporary English Version)

A Dishonest Manager

¹Jesus said to his disciples:

A rich man once had a manager to take care of his business. But he was told that his manager was wasting money. ²So the rich man called him in and said, "What is this I hear about you? Tell me what you have done! You are no longer going to work for me."

³The manager said to himself, "What shall I do now that my master is going to fire me? I can't dig ditches, and I'm ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I'll do, so that people will welcome me into their homes after I've lost my job."

⁵Then one by one he called in the people who were in debt to his master. He asked the first one, "How much do you owe my master?"

⁶"A hundred barrels of olive oil," the man answered.

So the manager said, "Take your bill and sit down and quickly write 'fifty'."

⁷The manager asked someone else who was in debt to his master, "How much do you owe?"

"A thousand bushels of wheat," the man replied. The manager said, "Take your bill and write 'eight hundred'."

⁸The master praised his dishonest manager for looking out for himself so well. That's how it is! The people of this world look out for themselves better than the people who belong to the light.

Jesus begins in the first 8 verses of this passage by telling a parable about a dishonest administrator. Some people say that this particular parable was based on a real person. This manager hasn't been managing his boss's business properly. He has not kept good accounts and the word has got out there that this guy is costing his master money and is not professional. The master calls him in to question him and is clearly about to check the books and sack this guy as being incompetent and dishonest.

The business manager knows that he is about to get the sack and so he comes up with this plan to pave the way for his retirement. He knows that he probably won't get another good job and he doesn't want to do manual work and so he goes to the people who owe his boss money and basically halves their bills and signs a receipt to them for money they haven't paid to his master.

His plan is this, he knows that he is going to get the sack but by ripping the boss off he quite rightly expects those he is saving a lot of money to help him out. He's about to be out of a job but he knows that he can go to these guys and they will treat him well and give him food and a bed because they owe him.

Now Jesus never condones or supports dishonest business practices but he recognises something good about this guy, at least he is planning for the future. He is not living on the basis of today alone but he is putting things in place so that when he gets the boot he will still be looked after practically.

Jesus says that there are people of the light, people of His kingdom, who are not preparing for eternity as carefully as this guy and some people of the world are preparing for their retirement.

Now Jesus using this story of the crafty manager as a springboard begins to preach and teach a sermon on money and giving.

Money in church is a touchy subject. As a church I believe that we are really good givers and most of the family are committed to giving through the envelope system or the A.P system. When we hear that there is going to be a sermon on giving though, many people feel like quickly going out to check on the kids or the dinner that is in the crock pot at home. And I understand that. Because Christians are constantly bombarded with requests for money and something that should be a job and a blessing ends up being a topic that is synonymous with pressure and expectation. Virtually every day I get very good groups and worthy ministries sending me letters and DVD presentations asking me to ask the church for support. I throw them all in the bin with a very clear conscience and I'll tell you why.

I believe those that are mature in faith should tithe to the local church not because they have to or as a requirement but as an act of worship. I have done that for years and I love tithing. I also believe that the Holy Spirit will direct us as to where and to whom to give offerings. Some 5 years ago a group of about 50 people prayed for a month about who to support in terms of overseas mission. Everyone's missionary passions were shared with the group and then we prayed for the month. At the end of the month 49 of those 50 people said that they believed that the Holy Spirit wanted RBC to give offerings to Mission Without Borders and in particular the Nou project.

I believe that God was in that and so request after request comes and I bin them not because they are unworthy but because God has led us to give our offerings corporately to Nou. So my conscience is clear and I enjoy giving because Juliette and I tithe to the church, the storehouse, and we give offerings to Nou and to families as God directs.

I get these letters that say " if Christians don't support this ministry this person, or that radio broadcast or this mission it will cease". Sometimes Christian TV broadcasts say if you don't give now to this ministry that is reaching millions this ministry will conclude. To be honest it seems to me that, that stuff is manipulating us and causing us to give out of guilt and not worship and so it has a real cringe factor to it.

A month ago we had Jacob Damkani here to minister in the evening service. I thought that his teaching was great; I thought his ministry was a very worthy one; I agreed I think with every word; none of what he said was new to me but ... his half hour appeal for support I didn't like at all.

My response is this:

When God *guides*, He *provides*.

— Pastor Russell's conviction

I believe that we tithe to the storehouse if we can do it joyfully and with faith not out of legalism and we give offerings as the Holy Spirit directs.

If the Holy Spirit hasn't prompted me to give to a ministry then either it's not my responsibility or God is not guiding that ministry. I don't have to prop it up or feel guilt driven to give.

As most of you know Jesus spoke more about money and finance than any other topic in his teachings and that stands to reason because it's how we handle finance and steward money that truly reflects where we are at spiritually.

The Rand Corporation did a survey in America and discovered that American men spend 55% of their focused thinking time dealing with issues of finance. How to earn more, what do about their careers, concerns about finance, questions about it etc. Money related matters dominate people's thinking and Jesus is always really practical and as a consequence frequently addresses the issue of finance.

In our text Jesus makes four points about money and our stewardship of it. Because He said it we know that it is really important and though we know there is a cringe factor when Christians talk about finance because we have felt so manipulated at times we want to take in the full counsel of scripture.

1. GIVING REWARDS YOU IN ETERNITY VS9

VS 9 My disciples, I tell you to use wicked wealth to make friends for yourselves. Then when it is gone you will be welcomed into an eternal home.

Andrew Carnegie was a multi-millionaire and philanthropist and he coined the phrase 'millionaires never smile' because he was never happy. In his youth he thought that if he got more he would be happy. Then he got mega millions and found that the expectation was false. When he died a reporter asked his son "tell us how much did your father leave behind?" The son gave him the classic answer "he left everything."

Now people have always thought they could take their money with them; in the pyramids they buried their dead with lots of gold and tools etc but the reality is when you die you can't take any of it with you however ... this passage suggests that you can send it on ahead.

Now Paul and Peter in the NT were to speak of money as if it had some evil entity attached to it. Paul even said to his young intern Timothy that "the love of money is the root of all evil." Now usually people who work hard and are wise benefit financially and so the paper and the coins themselves may be spiritually neutral in our view, but the reality is greed or covetousness or the love of money as Paul put it does suggest that finance and how we handle it or lust for it is a key tool in the enemies hands and can be a key tool if stewarded properly in God's hands.

Even though satan often uses this love of money as a trap for people Jesus said in

VS 9 My disciples, I tell you to use wicked wealth to make friends for yourselves. Then when it is gone you will be welcomed into an eternal home.

The dodgy business manager who planned ahead has a lesson to teach the children of the light, and that is if you make friends with this wicked wealth, if you tame it and domesticate it and control it and not let it control you; then when you get to heaven it will be there to greet you. Now I don't know what that looks like practically but Jesus is saying, hey if you master this stuff money, and don't let it master you, then when you get to heaven how you have used money to God's glory will reap for you eternal benefits, somehow it has gone ahead and you get rewarded in heaven; i.e. your giving here will benefit your life there. Now you might say to me, Russell I don't care about what I get in heaven as long as I make it. I appreciate that but if Jesus said if giving here affects rewards there then it must be important.

I am sure if we gave as the Holy Spirit directs here and maybe that means we won't buy a new DVD player or update that car at this stage, I am sure that when we get to heaven we aren't going to look at these rewards and say, darn should have bought the DVD player. NO way. We are going to look at what has been sent ahead and say. Wow, I traded in that for this – Oh ho, good deal!

In the early 1800's King William Frederick the 3rd was king of Prussia and he was involved in fighting so many wars. He ran out of money and so in order to finance his armies and keep the war effort going he went to the ladies of the kingdom and asked them to melt down their gold and silver jewellery and give it to him for the war effort and in return he would give them a hunk of cheap metal in the shape of a cross. Many ladies did it and wore these iron crosses proudly; they were honoured and revered and were known as women of the order of the iron cross.

King Frederick took their gold and gave them a hunk of iron.

King Jesus will take what we give Him and give you great rewards in heaven if you are a good steward of your money on earth.

If you control wicked wealth you will get to keep it, it will go on ahead of you into eternity and be there to bless you, to welcome you when you get home.

Secondly;

2. GIVING RELEASES YOU IN MINISTRY

This is a great family to belong to for many reasons and one of them is this that most people when you take time to talk to them, most of us really want to be used more and more by the Lord to make a difference for His Name in this world. We want to be used more and more in the ministries he has for us.

Vs10 Anyone who can be trusted in these 'little matters'. What does little matters mean? It means the common thing; the little thing; the thing that everyone to some degree has at their disposal and has a responsibility for – i.e. money. I may not be able to bake but you can, I may be able to teach but you are musical. We each have different gifts and abilities but we all have money. Now you may be quick to say to me Russell I don't, really; but consider this if we lived our full 50yrs on the benefit at \$15,000 a year that would \$750,000 we are to be stewards with over our lives. Whatever we have; a little or a lot we need to manage wisely with a kingdom perspective.

Vs 10. Anyone who can be trusted in little matters can also be trusted in important matters. But anyone who is dishonest in little matters will be dishonest in important matters. ¹¹If you cannot be trusted with this wicked wealth, who will trust you with true wealth?

True wealth in this context appears to be talking about a life or a ministry that really makes a difference. I am truly wealthy when my life is making a real difference for His Name.

How does God measure whether or not He can trust us with more ministries or a life with greater impact? He looks at how we handle little matters, how we handle our money to see if we can be trusted with true wealth – a life of significant ministry.

D.L Moody once put it this way

'I can tell more about the spirituality of a man by reading through his cheque book than I can be reading through his prayer book'.

– D.L Moody

Here's the point that Moody makes and the Lord makes here. How can we tell where a person is really at spiritually? People can sing songs, write amazing stuff in their prayer journals, they can look good and impressive spiritually to us but... the barometer of where they are really at spiritually is seen in how they manage their finances.

The person who handles their finances wisely, in a God honouring way shows that they are truly spiritual and God can then trust them with greater ministries.

Giving will bring rewards eternally; it will also release you into greater ministry currently.

3. IT WILL BENEFIT YOU PRACTICALLY (Financially)

Vs12. And if you cannot be trusted with what belongs to someone else, who will give you something that will be your own?

We have shared before that God doesn't promise to make you all millionaires but he does promise you an abundant life if you are living by His principles. Now I believe that an abundant life means that I have enough to meet my own needs and some left to give away to others. So it does include financial blessing and prosperity.

This is such a cryptic verse, I kind of felt like the guy on you tube who is in awe of the double rainbow, "what does it mean?" when I read this but let's break it down.

I think that what I earn is my money, it's mine, isn't it?

No in fact it's not. The truth is everything belongs to the Lord but specifically the first part of what I earn, the first fruit; the first 10% belongs to the Lord specifically.

In the context of a message by Jesus on giving this must be what He meant.

In Proverbs 3 God says give to me the first fruits that is the first part of your produce as an offering. What we give to God should be what we have decided in our hearts in advance to put aside for Him on pay day not what is left in the wallet at the end of the week. Give God your first fruit. I am pretty sure that the day Andy pays me is the day my AP goes out to the church. That's the way it should be 'first fruits.'

Malachi 3:8-12...

⁸You people are robbing me, your God. And, here you are, asking, "How are we robbing you?"

You are robbing me of the offerings and of the ten percent that belongs to me. ⁹That's why your whole nation is under a curse. ¹⁰I am the LORD All-Powerful, and I challenge you to put me to the test. Bring the entire ten percent into the storehouse, so there will be food in my house. Then I will open the windows of heaven and flood you with blessing after blessing. ¹¹I will also stop locusts from destroying your crops and keeping your vineyards from producing. ¹²Everyone of every nation will talk about how I have blessed you and about your wonderful land. I, the LORD All-Powerful, have spoken!

The first 10% of what I earn specifically belongs to the Lord and he wants me to give it to the local church, the storehouse. If I do then I will be financially rewarded; God will protect my property and my business and my land and I will be blessed; if I give God back what belongs to him specifically.

I would never tell people they have to tithe to belong to the church. What they give and how much is between them and God but I will tell people that I believe that the first 10% is another man's money, it's the Lord's. Jesus reaffirmed tithing in Luke 11:42 and we know it was the practice of the early church from what commentators write about 1 Corinthians 16:2 and the practice of the early church from what we learn from church history.

To give God back through giving it to the storehouse, the local place of gathering and worship, is not about giving to this church or that denomination, it's all about giving to the Lord what is His anyway, and if you can be trusted with that money that specifically, biblically belongs to him then I believe you will experience what it is to live an abundant life. A life where you have enough and are content and you have some left to give away in offerings.

Haggai 1:9 describes what it is like for people who don't put the first fruits aside to give back to God what is his. It's like having holes in your pockets. You put the money in and it disappears again and again.

That is not a blessed, protected, prosperous life; the kind of life that God wants to give you if you steward, His money faithfully.

Giving will bring eternal rewards,

Giving will release you into greater ministry

Giving will bring you practical rewards now and finally;

4. GIVING WILL MOULD YOU PERSONALLY

Vs 13. You cannot be the slave of two masters. You will like one more than the other or be more loyal to one than to the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Jesus was saying that either you will be serving the Lord and led by the Holy Spirit or you will be serving your selfish desires and led by your appetite for more. You cannot serve both God and your love of money. There is a really neat story at the end of Genesis 14 where Abraham God's friend, the man of faith rescues his nephew Lot and other inhabitants captured from the city of Sodom from an evil king. Somehow amazingly Abraham and his staff go to war with this evil king and capture back the people and their possessions.

On his way back he meets the King of Salem which means peace, the man's name is Melchizedek. His name also means the king of righteousness. The book of Hebrews says that he has no beginning and no ending. Melchizedek is I believe Jesus prior to the virgin birth. He presents Abraham with bread and wine – the elements of communion. When the king of righteousness gives Abraham communion Abraham then does two things, firstly he fell down and worshiped Melchizedek and secondly he gave a tithe, a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek – to Jesus.

In the next verse after he has received communion and worshipped and paid his tithe guess who comes slithering up to Abraham?

The king of Sodom, the prince of perversity: He said hey, thanks for what you did back there freeing us all and all that, listen all this stuff that you have that originally came from Sodom, you can have it and enjoy it. It's all yours, take it all.

Abraham looks at the king of Sodom, the king of perversity and says; "I am not going to take anything from you mister". Abraham was already a very, very rich man and he could have just wanted more and more and here the king of perversity is saying, listen mate, take it all, enjoy; he tempts Abraham to be greedy and self focused and Abraham is able to say no. Why?

I believe because he just tithed back to the Lord. His heart had been moulded by the Lord and as a result he was able to resist the pull of wicked wealth, the temptation to be greedy and covetous. Had he not been a tither I don't know if Abraham would have been so strong. Giving moulds your heart.

When I was a young man, many moons ago I wrestled with greed. In my early days of marriage I HP'd all sorts of things and had lots of nice looking credit cards and store cards. I believe that I am a very content and happy man now, but I did not see God's supernatural provision on my life until I became a disciplined, weekly giver. I don't know that I prayed for God to take away the greed and make me content, but I know that over the years of tithing and giving offerings I have become that person.

It's often been said that

Giving is not God's way of raising money, its Gods way of raising children.

That has been my experience.

Friends you cannot serve both God and money. Its true but the reality is if I serve the Lord by being a wise steward of His money then when all the ads each day bombard me saying buy this, you need that, you deserve this now, this product or that purchase will make you happy.

When the prince of perversion tries to tempt you and I into debt or greed; if we are givers we will find that we too like Abraham are free and able to say no.

14. The Pharisees really loved money. So when they heard what Jesus said, they made fun of him. 15. But Jesus told them; You are always making yourselves look good, but God sees what is in your heart. The things that most people think are important are worthless as far as God is concerned.

There are two normal responses for people to hear the Lord's teaching on finance.

The Pharisees among us say, rubbish, I am spiritual but I don't need to give, it doesn't need to affect my wallet, what a joke. This teaching annoys me; it bugs me, its rubbish.

The Pharisees get annoyed and make fun of Him but I believe God's children say Lord, you said this was important and so it is.

I will control this little matter and not let it control me. I will send it ahead and be faithful with money so you can release me to greater ministries and I will trust you to protect and bless and prosper me practically in this life and I desire to allow this tool to mould my heart so that I can live free and be ever more like you Lord.