

“Eternal Future Focused”

“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” (Luke 16:9).

This past week, there was a story that surfaced in the world of college sports about the amount of money spent in recruiting. This story was specifically focused on the University of Texas, probably know better to many of us as the Longhorns. You see, reports surfaced that revealed the amount of money Texas spent on two major recruiting weekends and that number was \$630,000. One of those weekends, involved hosting nine potential players, one of whom was the highly-sought-after quarterback, Arch Manning, the nephew of former NFL quarterbacks Eli and Peyton Manning.

On this particular visit, with Arch and eight others, the Longhorns spent \$280,000. From travel costs, to lodging costs, to food and entertainment costs, the Longhorns spared no expense to make sure that these young men felt at the very least welcomed and comfortable and probably much more like the future superstars that the Longhorns want them to be for their football program. This kind of investment is astounding, I mean if you simply divided the total spent on this visit by the nine individuals who were hosted the average amount spent on each individual on this trip was just over \$30,000! For many colleges, public or private, that could be quite close to a year’s tuition payment spent nine times over!

Yet, the bottom line question is, was this spending worth it? In the eyes of the Longhorn football staff and fans it most definitely was! Four of the nine who visited committed to playing for Texas and no commitment was bigger than Arch Manning’s. Large college football programs are always concerned about their football future and they aren’t afraid to invest heavily in that future security. There is a shrewdness to recruiting and many college football programs attempt to play this expensive game knowing the impact it will have on Saturday game days.¹

While I don’t mean to open a can of worms with the ongoing, massive debate and commentary on the state of recruiting in college sports, this particular story really serves as a modern day parallel to the story that Jesus shares in Luke 16. Not trying to approve any dishonest means, there is something telling here about the way college football programs, like Texas, go after their futures. They are shrewd about their futures and this concept is something we see in the manager in today’s Gospel lesson.

Coming on the heels of three really clear parables about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son, Jesus tells His disciples this account of the rich man and dishonest manager. Unlike the strong connections made between the previous parables’ characters and Jesus’ audience, this story’s characters aren’t as easily made symbols of that historic audience. Instead, this account according to Jesus’ own words that follow ultimately speaks to a person’s relationship with money and possessions in light of their eternal future. Even the language of unrighteous wealth in this section of Luke which highlights things that have been given by God in this world but have been frequently used in a sinful world by sinful people for unrighteous means is set against true riches which seems to imply something greater than just worldly, temporal wealth.

So, when we consider the manager from this passage, his dishonesty isn’t to be ignored or approved but it also isn’t the main focus for Jesus’ point. The manager’s concern with his future is the even bigger focus. He realized that this loss of job meant an insecure future and that something needed to be done to bring his future greater security. His future was what drove and motivated him to act and go after what he needed. His future led him to make use of the resources he had left so that when they ran out his future wouldn’t be in question.

From the manager’s very earthly, future focus, Jesus points His hearers to the heavenly, future focus. Unlike temporal housing that interested the manager in the story, Jesus reveals to His disciples

¹ Article referenced in the text: [Texas Longhorns spent nearly \\$280,000 during Arch Manning's official visit - CBSSports.com](https://www.cbssports.com/nfl/news/texas-longhorns-spent-nearly-280000-during-arch-manning-official-visit/)

something of greater interest, eternal dwellings. It is this eternal focus then, that truly informs a person's relationship with money and possessions this side of heaven. This eternal future drives and motivates one to serve God with money and possessions and not simply hide service to money and possessions behind lip service to God. That's what the Pharisees were doing, as we hear later in this same text. They were lovers of money who attempted to pass themselves off as lovers of God, but God was not fooled, He knew their hearts.

The perspective on money and possessions, a.k.a. worldly wealth or unrighteous wealth, that Jesus brings via an eternal future focus is so counterintuitive. According to Jesus, the money and possessions that God has loaned to this world, these temporal things pale in comparison to the true riches which God also gives. This is the reversal that Jesus so often brings upon this sinful world: much in the eyes of sinners is little in the eyes of God, little in the eyes of sinners is much in the eyes of God. All the money and possessions that any person is blessed to steward merely serve as practice for the eternal riches that God also does provide.

So, the bottom line question for us then is simply this, what's our future focus? Are we driven and motivated by the true riches of eternity and service to God or are we moved by our service to money and possessions? It's a humbling question to consider. For when we even look beyond our monetary treasures to our possession of time, our struggle becomes much clearer. Our time is so easily driven by temporal and earthly things. Days quickly fly by without regular prayer or devotions. Nights fill up so much that we crash before we even thank God for the day that He gave. Convenience, not health concerns, slowly leads us to remove ourselves from worshipping in person with this community of believers. So often our time is spent making worldly wealth, but then we struggle to make use of this wealth for work in God's kingdom and not simply in our own.

Our struggle with our future focus is also evident by the talents we exalt for ourselves. The physical prowess of being an athlete eats away at our time to train in God's Word. The dexterity and perfection to be a performer of the arts often handicaps our dexterity with God's Word. The knowledge and skills we desire to be successful students and have successful careers far outweighs the desires we have to be around the God who has given us those skills. Truth is, we may say we want our families and ourselves to be eternally future focused but the allotment of our time, talents and treasures shows otherwise. Too easily and sometimes without even realizing it our service to God is a mask covering up our true service to other idols.

God knows our hearts too! And for this reason, He sent Jesus who kept and continues to keep His focus on the eternal future, our eternal future, perfectly. He lived a life in our place that was faithful in very little so that through Him you and I might be forgiven and declared faithful with much. He lived His life here on earth in full devotion to God so that our lives of shallow devotion to God might be removed and restored by His gracious and generous mercy. With our eternal future in focus, Jesus suffered, died and rose. Jesus shrewdly handed Himself over to sin, death and the devil so that He might redeem us from their grasp. With resurrection victory, our Lord has won for us eternal future security!

Here again, in a few moments, we will be heading home and as we do the temptations of this earthly life will seek to cover up our focus on our eternal future. As these temptations come, know that you're not alone! Your Lord and Savior walks with you, knowing full well the struggles you face. And He also provides you with other Christians and resources to encourage and strengthen you to walk by faith and not by sight. When things this side of heaven are clouding your focus on heaven, reach out to your Christian friends, talk with your pastors, get connected to a Bible Study group who can share some of these burdens with you, continue in regular worship, fill your life with the true riches God is delivering to you in this place. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan