

When the Kingdom Comes Close: Faithful With Little

Luke 16:1–18

Main Idea: Kingdom citizens recognize that everything they possess belongs to God, and they prove their faithfulness by stewarding temporary things for eternal purposes.

Sales Not Management

This past week rain sort of squalled into Berkeley County, and it reminded me of one particular rainy day back in college. Rain was pouring. My little umbrella was doing everything it could to survive. I was making my way across campus to my Western Civilization class when I passed one of my favorite theology professors, Dr. Wilks.

As he hurried across campus, I hollered, "Dr. Wilks! Do something about this weather!"

Without missing a step, he smiled and replied, "I'm in sales—not management."

I've never forgotten that. He was making a theological joke. He was saying, "Craig, I don't run creation. I simply proclaim the One who does." He understood something we often forget. There is a God. And we are not Him.

When it comes to the weather, none of us is invited into the planning meeting. We don't decide when it rains. We don't determine tomorrow. We don't control our next heartbeat. Yet although we aren't managing the universe, every one of us has been entrusted with things to manage.

Every person in this room is managing something. Money. Time. Abilities. Influence. Relationships. Children. Opportunities. A career. A home. Spiritual gifts. The question isn't whether you're a manager. The question is whether you're managing faithfully.

Because none of us owns any of it forever. One phone call. One diagnosis. One accident. One obituary. And then someone else is managing what we once called "mine."

Jesus says something that completely changes how we look at life.

You're not an owner. You're a steward. Everything changes when you realize that.

I. Kingdom Citizens Recognize They Are Managers, Not Owners (vv. 1–8)

Now Jesus tells one of the strangest parables in the Gospels. At first reading it almost sounds as though Jesus is praising dishonesty. But that's not what's happening. Let's slow down.

The manager has been wasting his master's possessions. Word reaches the master. He's called in. The manager is fired. Only one thing remains. Turn in the books. The manager immediately realizes his future is in jeopardy.

"I am not strong enough to dig." "I'm too ashamed to beg." So he develops a plan. Before his dismissal becomes official, he calls in the master's debtors. One owes one hundred measures of oil.

He says, "Make it fifty." Another owes one hundred measures of wheat. "Write eighty." He is not suddenly becoming righteous. He is acting shrewdly. He recognizes something incredibly important. The present situation is temporary. That bears repeating without being patronizing.

I have a limited amount of time to prepare for what comes next. That's what Jesus commends. Not dishonesty. Foresight. Not corruption. Wisdom.

Jesus is teaching to be as intentional about eternity as this man was about tomorrow. Then comes the surprise.

"The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." The world plans.

People save for retirement. They purchase insurance. They write wills. They establish trusts. They invest for grandchildren they may never meet. So many plans to take care of a bunch of tomorrows. Yet how often do believers think intentionally about eternity?

We spend incredible effort preparing for thirty years of retirement while giving comparatively little thought to forever.

Suppose your doctor called tomorrow and said, "You have thirty days to live." Your calendar would change overnight. Arguments wouldn't seem nearly as important. You would call people you've needed to forgive. You would seek reconciliation. You would say the things you've always meant to say.

You wouldn't suddenly have more time. You would simply realize how precious your remaining time actually is. Jesus says that is how Kingdom citizens ought to live every day. Not because we know when we'll die. But because we know eternity is certain. Are you convinced that eternity is certain one way or the other?

Everything in your wallet...Everything in your checking account...Your retirement...Your home...Your education...Your children...Your influence...Your career...

Psalm 24 says, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." None of it ultimately belongs to us. We are managers entrusted with another King's possessions.

II. Kingdom Citizens Invest What Is Temporary for What Is Eternal (vv. 9–13)

Verse 9 may be one of the most misunderstood verses Jesus ever spoke. Jesus is not saying money purchases Heaven. Salvation has never been for sale. He is saying temporary resources should be invested in eternal purposes.

Money becomes missions. Money becomes Bibles. Money becomes church planting. Money becomes disaster relief. Money becomes caring for widows. Money becomes feeding hungry families. Money becomes supporting pastors. Money becomes sending students to camp. Money becomes children's ministry. Money becomes nursery workers. Money becomes grief support. Money becomes discipleship.

Eventually every dollar disappears. But what it accomplishes for Christ never will.

Imagine arriving in Heaven. Someone you've never met walks toward you.

They smile and say, "I heard the gospel because your church supported missionaries." "I came to Christ because someone paid for camp." "The Bible was translated into my language because believers gave faithfully." "The church that disciplined me existed because God's people invested in eternity."

Now, to be clear, your money will never arrive there. But those people can. **The only earthly investments that cross into eternity are people transformed by the gospel.** What an incredible thought.

The money itself is gone. But the fruit remains forever.

Stewardship Is Bigger Than Money

Now don't miss something important. Some of you hear a sermon like this and immediately think, "I don't have much money." Maybe that's true. But stewardship has always been bigger than finances.

Every one of us has time. Every one of us has influence. Every one of us has conversations. Every one of us has spiritual gifts. Every one of us has opportunities. Every one of us has neighbors. Every one of us has children or grandchildren, coworkers, classmates, and friends. God isn't asking all of us to steward the same amount. He is asking every one of us to steward faithfully whatever He has entrusted to us.

Then Jesus gives one of the greatest principles in all of Scripture. "He who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much."

God watches little things. Small responsibilities reveal large character. Returning the shopping cart. Keeping your word. Showing up on time. Working diligently when nobody notices. Being honest on your taxes. Treating people kindly when they cannot repay you.

None of these things seem extraordinary. But faithfulness is rarely spectacular. It is usually ordinary obedience repeated over a lifetime. Paul later summarizes this beautifully. "It is required of stewards that they be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:2)

Not famous. Not wealthy. Not successful by the world's standards. Faithful.

Verse 13 — The Climax

Now Jesus reaches the heart of the passage. "No servant can serve two masters." This has never really been about money. It's about worship.

Money simply reveals what already rules our hearts. Money promises security. It promises identity. It promises comfort. Money promises importance. And money promises that you will have enough.

But money never delivers what it promises. Jesus doesn't say money is evil here. No, He says competing masters are impossible. You will ultimately love one. Trust one. Follow one. Serve one. Stewardship doesn't create worship. It exposes it.

III. Kingdom Citizens Reveal Their True Master (vv. 14–18)

Luke immediately tells us why Jesus said all this. "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money..." Notice what Luke doesn't say. He doesn't say they possessed money. He says they loved it. Their wallets revealed their worship.

Jesus says, "What is exalted among men is an abomination before God."

The Kingdom completely reverses the values of this world. The world says, "Get more. Protect yourself. Build your kingdom."

Jesus says, "Give. Serve. Trust. Lose your life in order to find it."

And then we come to verse 18 and ask ourselves, why verse 18 with all this money talk? At first it feels disconnected. Suddenly Jesus is talking about divorce. But He's making the same point.

The Pharisees had become experts at editing God's Word whenever obedience became inconvenient. When specific topics came up, Pharisees tended to edit and twist and distort. Money. Marriage. Power. Religion.

If God's commands became costly, they simply adjusted the interpretation. Jesus says Kingdom citizens don't rewrite God's Word to fit their desires. Faithful stewards submit to the King even when obedience costs them something.

Gospel Connection

If we're honest, every one of us has failed as stewards. We've wasted time. Misused money. Ignored opportunities. Neglected people. Taken God's gifts for granted. We've lived as owners instead of managers. But there is One who never failed.

Jesus Christ. The perfectly faithful Steward. He perfectly obeyed His Father. He perfectly fulfilled every assignment. He perfectly loved every person. He perfectly completed every work the Father gave Him to do.

Then, at the cross, He willingly took the judgment deserved by unfaithful stewards like us. Three days later He rose victorious, proving His work was complete. Forgiveness isn't offered because we've managed well. Forgiveness is offered because Christ was perfectly faithful in our place.

One day every steward will stand before the King. Not just pastors. Not just wealthy people. Every one of us. Imagine standing before Christ. Not to determine whether you're His. If your faith is in Him, that question was settled at the cross.

But standing before your King to give an account for how you handled everything He lovingly placed into your hands. Your marriage. Your children. Your work. Your gifts. Your time. Your influence. Your resources. Your opportunities.

He won't ask, "Why weren't you someone else?"

He'll ask, "What did you do with what I entrusted to you?"

That is the question of stewardship.

Next Steps

This week ask yourself:

1. What has God entrusted to me?
2. Am I managing it or claiming ownership?
3. What temporary resource can become an eternal investment?
4. Which master is truly ruling my heart?

Closing

Everything you possess is temporary. Every opportunity is stewardship.
Every act of faithfulness echoes into eternity.

The Kingdom comes close whenever God's people recognize that everything belongs to the King, faithfully steward what He has entrusted to them, and joyfully use temporary things to accomplish eternal purposes.