

A Window of Opportunity That Will Soon Be Closed

Luke 16:1-13

When my kids were growing up, they had a box that acted like C.S. Lewis's wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. As you remember, the wardrobe was a closet in which hung all kinds of coats and sweaters and garments, and the kids in the story passed through it to another world.

For our kids, it was something we called the "dress-up box" ... filled with costumes that enabled them to play temporary roles in plays and dramas that they made up themselves. The girls could be grown-up women, queens, various types of animals or other things as far as their imaginations would carry them... the boys could be kings or warriors or athletes; but the outfits were TEMPORARY... when they took off the clothes, the moment had passed.

I believe the roles we play in this temporary lives of ours are like that... we put on costumes assigned to us by God relating to our gifts, our wealth, our roles in society, our education, our looks, our intelligence... but they are all like dress-ups; at some point, we will give our costumes back to God and he will ask us about who we REALLY were while wearing those costumes... what kind of love and sacrifice and commitment and faith and courage and compassion we showed in the midst of our providentially assigned roles and circumstances

This life is fleeting and temporary, and someday, we will die and give it all back to God. And we will stand before him and give an account to him

This is the third and final sermon I will preach on stewardship in connection with the More Than a Building campaign

For those of you who have not been with us for the last two sermons, let me just remind you what this is all about

The elders of FBC are calling on the members of the church to give sacrificially to renovate our building. The reason for this is that our building aging, and there are some significant areas that need to be addressed in order just to simply keep using this facility over the next few decades... all things wear out, and our building is no exception.

But beyond this, the elders felt it was wise to upgrade some of the floors of our 1962 educational building as well... to freshen up the look architecturally, to remove walls that are blocking the natural light, to bring some of the teaching spaces of the church into the same kind of architectural freshness that we see in the "Welcome Center" right behind me... a 21st century look that is so appealing

Our desire is that this work on our building will position us very well to be a platform for the gospel ministry that has been going on here... we are in a booming area of the country, with thousands of people pouring in to the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area to live, work, and study

We deeply desire to win the lost among these people, to build them up to maturity in their faith, and to use them to reach others as well

We are well aware that a building alone can not do this... we could have the prettiest building in the state, with breath-taking architecture, and lavishly comfortable and attractive furnishings... but if the Word of God is not being taught here, and if Jesus Christ is not being worshipped here, and if effective, fervent prayer for missions is not happening here, and

if ministry to the poor and need in this region is not occurring here – it will all be for nothing

There are many texts I could take you to to persuade you to give financially... but there is one that captivated my mind some time ago, and I want to focus on it this morning – the “Parable of the Shrewd Steward” sometimes called “The Parable of the Unjust Steward.” It’s found in Luke 16:1-13.

My basic point is going to be this: **USE YOUR TIME, ENERGY, and MONEY WHILE YOU HAVE THEM** to building the eternal Kingdom of God

All of us are stewards of money and possessions that are not really ours... someday, and we don’t know when, we will **LOSE OUR JOBS** as stewards of these things... we will **DIE** and all of these things will be taken from us

There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity for us all... **USE THESE RESOURCES NOW** to win relationships for the Kingdom of God... use them while you have them, because soon they will all be gone anyway

I. The Parable of the Shrewd Steward Explained

A. The Parable Summarized

A wealthy owner finds out his servant (steward) has been wasting his assets and decides to **FIRE** him

The **KEY IDEA** of the parable is that the steward doesn’t lose his position immediately, but it going to lose it **SOON**

[Note; a steward is a person who manages someone else’s property and is held accountable for what he does]

The steward is used to a comfortable life of ease and doesn’t want to beg or work with his hands

So he comes up with a brilliant idea: he will use the authority of his position to buy favor with his master's debtors

He goes to the people who owe his master, and he significantly reduces their debt; one man owes his master 800 gallons of olive oil – the steward tells him to sit down and write a new IOU with only 400 gallons owed... he cut his debt in HALF; he does the same thing with a man who owes 1000 bushels of wheat... he cuts off 20% of the debts and reduces it to a mere 800

This results in them all having a strong sense of gratitude to him which he expects will result in them opening their homes to him and taking him in once his job as steward is over

When his master finds out what he's done, he actually PRAISES this unrighteous steward for his CLEVERNESS... his shrewdness

A VERY STRANGE PARABLE... it's what we would call "influence peddling" and it's illegal in our government and business world

Jesus is using some pretty questionable ethics to teach us a valuable lesson

You are all stewards of God's possessions... they are not yours, they belong to God. Just like the steward in the parable, someday you will lose your position. USE YOUR TEMPORARY WEALTH TO MAKE FRIENDS FOR YOURSELF FOR THE SAKE OF AN ETERNAL KINGDOM

Use your money wisely now, because someday it will all be gone

The wisest thing you can do with the money is to build earthly friendships for the kingdom

Luke 16:9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

II. The Parable Applied to Our Christian Lives Generally

A. The Brevity of Life

1. All of us are mortal... we are all going to die someday

Hebrews 9:27 man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment

Genesis 3:19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.

2. Our lives here on earth are fleeting and very uncertain

James 4:13-16 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

B. Everything we own is really a stewardship

Luke 16:12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

1 Chronicles 29:14-16 "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. ¹⁵ We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. ¹⁶ O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.

1. Since everything we have is really God's and since our time here on earth is brief and uncertain, we are exactly like the steward in the parable who will soon lose our position
2. We have a rapidly closing window of opportunity in which to use our money wisely for the Kingdom of God

3. Jesus said that we should use worldly wealth to gain friend for ourselves so that WHEN IT IS GONE, they will welcome us into eternal dwelling places
4. Someday, everything you think is yours will be taken from you... you will leave it all behind because it really wasn't yours anyway

Randy Alcorn: "Money can be a tool of Christ. But it must be used as such now, before our period of service on earth ends. There will be no second chance to use the money for Christ later. After his termination was effective, after he could work no longer, the manager would have no more leverage. He used his final days of service to win friends who could take him into their dwellings when his work was done."

C. Use Temporary Resources to Build Friendships

1. Though the money really belongs to God and is only temporary, it has ETERNAL VALUE
2. If we are generous with our money, it will be useful in building relationships for the eternal kingdom of God

Luke 16:9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

3. How does worldly wealth GAIN FRIENDS?
 - a. As we generously see needs and meet needs and offer rich hospitality, it creates a sense of gratitude and love in the heart of the person you're blessing
 - b. This certainly works in terms of giving a party or a banquet in which you roll out the red carpet
 - c. Your guests feel cared for, their needs are met, and they express heart-felt gratitude
 - d. So also when we give to the poor and needy, if we do it gently, lovingly and cheerfully, there is a strong bond of friendship that forms

4. Money cannot buy souls, money cannot buy Christian growth, money cannot buy salvation or forgiveness of sins... all money can ever do it buy PHYSICAL THINGS
5. But those physical things—like in rich, warm hospitality—create the context for a lasting friendship
6. If done in the name of Christ, it can be instrumental in winning lost people to Christ
7. For twenty centuries, Christians have used their money to spread the gospel and to alleviate temporary suffering—to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, house the homeless
8. Money paid the fare for missionaries to sail to India or Burma or China in the 19th century, as it pays the fare to put missionaries on planes now; money supported the physical needs of missionaries and their families... food, clothing, shelter, to keep them doing the work of the gospel
9. Money did all those things, but money never bought a single soul for the eternal Kingdom
10. What's happening in all of this at the human level is FRIENDSHIPS are being formed for the gospel, for the eternal Kingdom... just like the unrighteous steward build a sense of GRATITUDE in the hearts of the people whose debts he reduced, so money now can MAKE FRIENDS for the gospel

D. “Welcomed Into Eternal Dwellings”

Luke 16:9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

1. What does it mean that you will be WELCOMED INTO ETERNAL DWELLINGS?
2. The word “eternal” is pointing to our heavenly home... a WELCOME into heavenly reward

2 Peter 1:11 you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

3. The way we spend our earthly resources will affect our heavenly welcome and our heavenly dwelling place
4. Who are these FRIENDS who will welcome us into heavenly dwellings?
 - a. I think it is not a stretch to think it is the people who we blessed on earth with the money the Lord wanted us to give
 - b. The people we WON to the Lord with the gospel; the poor people we helped with our generosity... our eternal FRIENDS through the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - c. Perhaps the “eternal dwelling places” are their own heavenly homes that they will welcome you into... heavenly hospitality
 - d. Or perhaps the eternal dwelling place is your own heavenly home
5. Christ taught about heavenly dwelling places... we will have physical resurrection bodies, so those bodies will need a place to be for all eternity

John 14:2-3 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Remember my recent sermons on the New Jerusalem, where God and the redeemed will DWELL together forever

Revelation 21:2-3 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Remember that the New Jerusalem was measured by the angel with a measuring rod

Revelation 21:16 The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.

Alcorn's description of our heavenly dwelling:

Alcorn says that it is possible that the building materials for our own heavenly homes are being sent ahead by our earthly generosity:

1 Corinthians 3:12-14 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

"If we follow through with the construction and residence imagery that the Scripture itself employs, then all believers are engaged in a sort of eternal building project, the results of which will vary widely. We might imagine that some of us are sending ahead sufficient materials for pup tents, some for studio apartments, some for trailer homes, some for ranch houses, and others for great mansions. (Alcorn says: I only intend this as an illustration, but remember it is the Scripture, not me, that tells us that we will have real dwelling places in heaven) If we imagine that Jesus employs angels in our heavenly building projects, we might envision asking them, 'Why isn't my house larger than this?' To which they might reply, 'We did the best we could with what you sent us.'

Or we could turn it all around and say the Lord says we will be welcomed into "eternal dwelling places" (plural)... so the better image is that they will be showing US their heavenly homes... and they will welcome us as having played a key role in getting them to heaven in the first place

God used our generosity with our time, energy, and money as a tool to save their souls by the gospel

Alcorn cites Ray Bolz's song "Thank you":

In that song, Bolz pictures in a dream individuals who would approach him in heaven and thank him for giving to the Lord, saying, "I am a life that was changed"

Alcorn: "One day, our money will be useless. While it's still useful, Christians with foresight will use it for eternal good."

E. Faithful in Little, Faithful in Much

Luke 16:10 "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."

1. Jesus goes on to say that God is effectively testing us all the time
2. He continually observes how we handle small responsibilities in order to decide whether to give us larger ones
3. If we are not faithful with handling the duties he's already entrusted to us, why would he give more?
4. God pay attention to the smallest details... the littlest things matter to God
5. It's no use making excuses on Christian giving, saying "If only I had more, I would give more"
6. How you are with the little you have is a test for how you'll be with more

F. Money vs. True Riches

Luke 16:11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

1. To Christ, worldly wealth are not TRUE RICHES
2. It's hard for us to understand this, because we are so accustomed to thinking of money as wealth
3. Billionaires can live at an incredibly high level, with their mansions and private jets and \$3 million sports cars and their diversified portfolio that is immune to current events

4. But Jesus in verses 10-11 says money is a “very little thing” and not “true wealth”
5. So what IS??? True riches are those things that God values and that will last for all eternity... and that is HUMAN SOULS

G. Bottom Line: Spend It Wisely WHILE IT’S YOURS TO SPEND!

1. All of our spendable resources are ours only for a very short time
2. Three spendable commodities I have already mentioned repeatedly: TIME, ENERGY, MONEY
 - a. They decrease with use... unlike intelligence or a musical gift or skill at teaching the Word which INCREASE with use
 - b. The verb used is SPEND... you SPEND your time until it is gone; you SPEND your energy (strength) until it is gone; you SPEND your money until it is gone
 - c. They can be replenished with a new day, or new strength, or more money... but the earlier ones were all spent and are gone
3. Each of these things is effectively ON LOAN from God; none of them are really ours, but they belong to HIM and he will call us to account for what we have done with them
4. The TIME IS SHORT... death will take everything from us and it will no longer be ours to spend
5. Not just death!! The window of opportunity will close and we can no longer spend any of these things because the moment has passed
6. I have often thought if the Lord wants me to give X amount to some ministry, and I don’t he may well orchestrate events that I have to spend X on car repair or a medical issue I didn’t know about...
7. On the flip side, if we DO give generously throughout our lives—spending ourselves, our time, our energy, our money to bless others and build the Kingdom of God we will be storing up

treasure in heaven; God will be using your temporary treasures to do an eternally significant work

III. The Parable Applied to the More Than a Building Campaign

Over the past month, we have been hearing what God's Word has to say about stewardship.

This morning, we have an opportunity to apply these truths by responding to what God's Word says and recording our commitment toward the More Than a Building Initiative.

The elders are fully aware that a building will not save anyone. With that in mind, we also know that since 1927, the building has been a great tool and home base for our ministry to our surrounding community. In an effort to steward our geography well, we as a church voted to move forward with a \$3.5 million renovation initiative. To that end, we have come to a time of corporate commitment.

As you heard last week, we have already had a number of individuals eager to commit early and have received commitments for a third of the project cost.

In your bulletin, you will find a commitment card that looks like this (hold up commitment card).

If you did not receive a bulletin on your way in, there are cards at the end of each pew.

In a few moments, after I pray, as the team plays quietly, we will ask you to fill out your commitment card indicating the amount that the Lord has led you to commit to give over a three year period.

Once you have filled out your card, please fold it in half and pass them to the middle aisle where we will have ushers collect them.

Pray with me as we enter this time of commitment to the Lord.