

## Title: “Serving God”

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**Luke 16:1-15**

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**Overview:** We are called to focus our efforts and resources towards bringing the knowledge and love of God to all those we meet.

**Lesson:** “You'll know when you are serving God rather than money when you use money ‘shrewdly’ among people so that the Gospel of the Kingdom gains a hearing.”

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Bill Gates was, until around 2017, the richest man in the world, with an estimated net worth of almost \$90 billion dollars. It's a shame, but his wealth was then surpassed by Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, even while his own exceeded \$95 billion. Oh, the troubles of the rich! Today, he and his wife spend much of their time focused on philanthropic efforts across the world but he wasn't always like that.

He was a shrewd business man who started Microsoft in 1976 when he contacted a computer company and informed them that he had written software for their new computer; he hadn't and so when they agreed to meet for a demo, he and his partner feverishly worked for weeks to build one.

Several years later, Microsoft was hired to help Apple write software and both of the companies received a demonstration of a new program from Xerox. Both companies went back to their offices and proceeded to copy much of what they saw. Soon after, Apple became very angry when they discovered that Microsoft was using the same ideas to build a competing version of this software and so Apple sued.

Bill was confronted by the Apple CEO, Steve Jobs, in a conference room one day. “You're ripping us off!” he shouted. “I trusted you, and now you're stealing from us!”

Bill sat there quietly and then calmly replied:

“Well, Steve, I think there's more than one way of looking at it. I think it's more like we both had this rich neighbor named Xerox and I broke into his house to steal the TV set and found out that you had already stolen it.”

Let me ask you a question. When you layer this knowledge of Bill Gates on top of our Gospel reading today, what goes through your mind? Listen again to the first few verses.

“There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. <sup>2</sup> So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’

<sup>3</sup> “The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg— <sup>4</sup> I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’”

What does this manager do? He reduces the debts of the customers to bring favor upon himself. I would imagine that the lesson from Jesus would be simple: “be honest. This is not how you should behave!” But it isn’t. He says, starting in verse 8:

<sup>8</sup> “The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. <sup>9</sup> I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

Jesus seems to be saying that not only is there a certain way of doing business in the world, but we ought to participate in it. He seems to be saying that we should live by the ethics of the world. And if that is the case, the actions of Bill Gates seem to align perfectly!

But this is not His message. His message is a lesson in what *not* to do. In the words of a pastor, Jesus is saying “learn a very important lesson from an unprincipled person. If the people of this world, in order to take care of a future that will not last, are willing to expend every energy, and exhaust every possibility in securing their future, what should be said of the children of the Kingdom who need to secure their eternal future? You need to invest more in eternity than in tomorrow.”

This manager was acting shrewdly, was spending enormous amounts of energy to secure his future on Earth, but what was he doing to secure it in heaven?

What about us? We all have responsibilities to our children, our spouses, and our parents. We all have a need to financially plan and prepare for our future, and there is nothing wrong with that. But the question that I have for you is this: what would someone from the outside say about how you achieve your security? What words might describe the amount of effort, the decisions that you make, and the focus that you have in doing so? How highly would they place this effort as a priority in your life?

And I have another, related question that really gets at the heart of this topic: What would others say about *who* you place your security in? Would they say that you are careful, diligent, and wise in your planning? Would they also add that you are not overly worried but are instead confident that the Lord will provide for all of your needs, now and into the future? And, would they say that you are instead focused on the needs of others, on answering the call of discipleship more than on securing your own future?

Pastor Mark once said, "You'll know when you are serving God rather than money when you use money 'shrewdly' among people so that the Gospel of the Kingdom gains a hearing."

We must act shrewdly like the manager, but for the furtherment of bringing the Gospel to every corner of the world. We must place our trust in the hands of God that He will provide to us all that we need, freeing us to focus our money, our time, and our treasures on what God has called us to do. And we do this by first adjusting our focus onto God - and Him alone. We forfeit the competition that we place between him and our money, or our career, our family, and our security. We abandon the belief that we are to gather unto ourselves possessions of any kind.

And we remind ourselves that everything we have, every breath we take, every morsel we eat, every shirt we wear, has come from God in some way. We remind ourselves that He has provided to us our talents and all of our skills.

Just like the rich man, God is interested in what we do with the gifts and resources he provides to us. Through the lens of our heart he watches to see if we even recognize these gifts. Do we take for granted the time, money, and talents that we have? Do we use them for our benefit or in service to His Church?

For you parents, maybe it is the selfless hours you spend pouring into your children the knowledge and ways of God. Maybe it is also the efforts that you take to ensure that they don't just go to church but that they have an ever-strengthening relationship with Jesus.

For others, maybe it is the countless hours that you spend volunteering your skills in service to others: sometimes with an organization and other times in ways hidden to everyone but you and God.

Maybe you have been blessed with financial wealth and your offerings substantially support the organizations that receive your gifts.

And maybe, for you children and teens, it is in the obedience that you show completing homework and chores without complaint or hesitation.

These are the possessions that belong to God and that he has placed in our hands to manage. Are we being good stewards? Are we being shrewd?

As we close today, I'd like to just take a moment to pause and reflect on the gifts of time and talents that God has provided to each one of us. I ask you to spend a minute and try to recognize each gift and how you have used it in the recent past. Is it for your glory or God's?

< pause >

Let's pray.

Lord,

You have blessed each of us with gifts: gifts of money, service, and talents and have asked us to use them to bring You glory. You have tasked us to be good stewards of these valuable gifts and not expect us to not use them for our own profit but to give them freely to others. We know that through this act of selfless giving we will be become more reliant on you to provide for our needs and continue to loosen our grip on all that we have been given. <MORE>

In your name we pray. Amen.