



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

Story Time - May 13/14, 2017 - Ron Friesen The Shrewd Dude- (Luke 16:1-15)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

We're in the middle of our *Story Time* series. This is the parables of Jesus and I think, if the truth be known, we all like a good story that has a point. We like a good illustration that suggests a certain truth that we can gain from that story or illustration, so I want to share one of those that will help introduce our parable this morning. I like hockey. I like hockey a lot. I like the Leafs [laughter]. I like them a lot, okay? I understand where some of you say, "Oh, not hockey. Not sports. I'm too blah, blah, blah." I get it, I get it, I get it. I'm a Leafs fan. I take a lot of abuse. It's terminal and I'm happy to live with that. We're at the final four of the Stanley Cup playoffs and for the last couple of weeks or a month or so, we've actually had hockey every day. For some of you, that's not good news. I get it, but here's the deal. There are certain players that I like. There are certain teams that I like. There are certain players that I dislike. There are certain teams that I dislike. I think we all have favourites. We all have those we like and dislike and if I use the names of certain players - like if I said Brad Marchand, and then if I said Brendan Gallagher, you know? If I said Alex Burrows. If I said, oh boy, Ryan Kesler, you know? - you're going, "Oh, I hate those guys! They drive me..." you know? You'll go into a rant about how they play the game. We look at them and I understand that, so they're known as dirty, they're known as cheaters, they're annoying, they try to get away with as much as they possibly can without getting a penalty. Some of these guys have actually been suspended for their actions. We get it. There are certain players whose tactics, whose play on the ice, annoys us. They are not nice on the ice. We get it. But, take a step back from that dislike and that, "Ooh, they drive me crazy." As much as I don't like these individuals, I do respect what they seek to accomplish. They bring to their teams a certain skill set (an annoying skill set), but they want to win. They want to succeed. And we're in this season of the Stanley Cup and every one of those players, what they want, is they want their chance to play for that Stanley Cup. They want that chance to have their name forever engraved on the Stanley Cup. They want that name so that they can show it to their wife, and they can show it to their kids, and they can show it to their grandkids down the road, and when they are gone their great grandkids will say, "That was my dad. He was on that team." "That was my great, great, great grandfather." Whatever. You see, the parable of the shrewd or dishonest manager, actually plays right into that.

So, we're going to look at Luke chapter 16. Luke 16:1-15. Turn there if you have your bibles. It's a parable. A parable is a little story with a big truth. That's what a parable is. Little story, big truth. This parable is often seen as difficult, confusing, somewhat, "What is Jesus saying here?" So, we want to dive right in there this morning and we're going to look at it and we're going to jump right into the



interpretation and application, and we want to see some observations. We're going to unpack it this way. I'm going to read these 15 verses and we're going to divide them up into five categories, okay?

- 1) The problem
- 2) The predicament
- 3) The plan
- 4) The praise
- 5) The preach

[The Problem]

Let's look at Luke chapter 16. We're going to turn there and we're going to read those verses - verses one and two. So, here's what he says, right off the get-go, what's really, really important when you look at a parable is: who is Jesus talking to? He says this,

“Then Jesus told his disciples: ‘There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you can [no longer] be my manager any longer.’”

So there is a problem. Jesus is speaking to his disciples. We get that right off the start, but if you were to fast forward this down to verse 15, you also see that there was another audience within earshot - the Pharisees. So Jesus is speaking to the disciples, but the Pharisees are listening. It's kind of like you are in a restaurant. You're in a booth - you and your family. You've got some friends there and you've got a conversation going, and all of a sudden there is that conversation in next booth right beside you. It's way better than the one you're having [laughter], so you're leaning back, “Ooooo.” You've got that going for you, you know? So it's kind of like that. The disciples are there, right in front of Jesus, but the Pharisees are on the outside. They're eavesdropping. Here we go. Verses one and two: There's a problem. Every parable has a plot. Every parable has information that we have got to unpack. The landowner - he's rich - he hires a manager. The manager works for the landowner. The manager manages the land that the landowner has and he brings in the money. He makes sure the land is being rented properly and there is a transition from the renter to the manager to the landowner. There's a flow of cash going. The landowner trusts this manager to manage all his goods, all his money, all his wealth, all his land. The landowner hears something. “What is this I hear?” Accusations were brought to him about how the manager is squandering or wasting the money of the landowner. So this would obviously --if you're a landowner, you'd say, “Oh wait a minute, that's not good. I'm going to bring him in. I'm going to talk to him.” In today's world, if you were in management, if you were in corporate America here, and you heard that, if you were the boss, and one of your managers was messing up, you'd bring him into your office and if it was grounds for firing, you'd fire him on the spot. Maybe a security officer would bring that person to their desk and they'd give you a box and you'd put all your personal possessions there and they would escort you out of the building. That's it. Nada. It's over. Not quite so much here in the times of Jesus. The landowner, obviously, bring all this to the attention of the manager, bringing these accusations, talking to him, says, “Okay, listen. This is what I've heard. I want those books and you're gone.” That's it. So, between the conversation and thereafter, there's some time. It's not going to happen just like that. So we get the problem that there's an issue here that the landowner has to take care of.



[The Predicament]

Then we move right into the predicament - The predicament of the manager. In verse three it says,

“And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.’”

In other words, he says, “I’m in trouble.” I don’t know if you’ve ever been fired. I don’t know if you’ve ever lost your job. Those things can just stop your world instantaneously. One moment I’ve got an income. One moment I’ve got a job. One moment I’m providing for my family. I’ve got a house, I’ve got all the things necessary, I’m moving right along, and then ‘boom’ it’s gone. It’s taken away from you. So, there’s a predicament here. He finally realizes what’s happened. Verse one talks about him squandering and wasting his landowners money. That’s the same word that’s used in the *Prodigal Son* story of the Prodigal Son wasting or squandering his father’s wealth. There’s huge waste, there’s a problem and he is the problem. He’s getting fired. But now, he comes to his senses. He says, “Wait a minute. What have I done? How am I going to live? I don’t have a house. I don’t have any money. What’s my family going to say? I have a terrible reputation now because no one will hire me. I’m unemployable. What do I do? So, he’s in this predicament. He says, “I don’t want to dig.” He’s a C.G.A., so he hasn’t been to the gym, and so what happens then, is that he’s got no muscles to dig ditches. He can’t throw a pick. Maybe he’s got a bum shoulder. Got a bum shoulder - can’t do it. And he’s way too proud to beg, so he’s not going to dig ditches and he’s not going to beg, so there are no options here. What can he do? So, this is where his creativity and his ultra-competitiveness kind of takes over. “What can I do?”

[The Plan]

That’s where the plan takes over in verse four through seven. He says this,

“I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here...” [he knows he’s getting fired], “people will welcome me into their houses.” [Interesting] “So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ‘Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.’ [Yes!] Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. He told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down, and make it eight hundred.’”

Wow, so he’s still has the authority over these land owners. “Okay, I can still meet with the people who owe my master money.” Whether this is interest, whether this is commission, whether he’s just carving out a good deal for his future, the master needs money. He’s gotten none of it. So, the master is going to get some money, but not all of it, because this manager goes in and he starts writing deals. He wrote a deal for this olive tree farmer. It takes about 150 olive trees to make about 800 or 900 gallons of olive oil. I don’t even like olives, okay? If you invite me over for pizza and you put olives on, not eating it. Just so you know. Don’t like olives. Don’t eat them. Don’t want them. But, if you can imagine --Do you know what you have to do to make olive oil? You’ve got to go to these trees. You take a big



stick and you smash the branches so that the olives fall down on the ground, and then you pick up and gather all of these olives and then take them into this place where they crush them and they drip into an oil thing, and they make a gallon. It takes about 330 olives to make one gallon, okay? It's a lot of work. Could you imagine, if you owed that much oil - 800/900 gallons of oil to this guy - and the manager says, "Make it 450." "You are now my best friend. You and I are going to do lunch together, guaranteed. You know, in fact, I may even have a management position available for you because I like you a lot." I don't know, but that is just part of what the deal is. Could you imagine, if your mortgage dealer, the bank manager, calls you tomorrow morning and says, "I'm looking at your mortgage and I'm thinking it should be half of what it is." You now have a new best friend. You have some school debt that you've accrued? You have to pay the government off and you can imagine if Prime Minister Trudeau calls you tomorrow and says, "By the way, that school debt, 50 percent off." "Wahoo." I mean, I get it. We all want a deal. That's exactly what this manager says. "We're going to make deals." So, he goes to this farmer. This farmer that is a wheat farmer. I can identify with the wheat farmer. I grew up in Saskatchewan and I understand what renting land is all about. In Saskatchewan, if you rented land, the land renter (or the sharecropper) would get two-thirds, and the landowner would get one-third for doing nothing. 100 acres of wheat produces about 1000 bushels. 100 acres that you have to cut down by hand with a sickle. You're cutting that wheat, then you're putting it into bushels, then you've got to haul it back home and you've got to put it into the threshing floor. You get oxen and mills and all that kind of stuff, just to get the grain. It's a lot of work. Manager says, "How much do you owe?" "1000." "Make it 800." "You are my best friend." So, you understand then, that there's a significant amount that is happening here. This is years of salary that are being wiped off the books. Wiped off. The master is going to lose some money here. The manager is going to gain some money here. He's doing it so that he would be welcomed into these people's home. One after another, not just two. The scripture would actually lead us to say that there are many. There are many that he is giving a good deal here. So there is that plan.

[The Praise]

Then we have the praise. Bit a problem here, but it's the praise. Verses eight and nine,

"The master..." [the person who was kind of "generous" without even knowing it] "commended the dishonest manager because he acted shrewdly. 'For the people of this world...' [Jesus says] "are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone..." [And it will be gone], "you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

It's these two verse where this parable becomes problematic, and sometimes we almost have to apologize for Jesus. "I don't know if he did it..." No, no, there are some good points here. There really is. We just don't want to get caught in some of this stuff that would sidetrack us from what is the big truth. So, here we go. He uses the word *shrewd*. He was commended for his shrewdness. "You're shrewd." Shrewd. Okay? It means astuteness or craftiness in dealings with others. Especially in using one's own understanding, judgement, or craftiness to one's own advantage.



Let me give you an example of shrewdness. It's Mother's Day. Happy Mother's Day to all of you. I trust this day will be awesome for you all. My mother passed away a number of years ago. I grew up on a small farm in small town Saskatchewan. Wealthy by no means, we kind of lived week by week, month by month. We had a few cows. Small farm, a few cows, and we milked cows. I milked cows by hand. Did anyone here, in this audience, milk cows by hand, ever? Oh, there was way more in the 8:30 service that milked cows [laughter]. Way more. Either that or you're not admitting it. I milked cows. We shipped cream to dairy producers in Saskatoon. Weekly and monthly, my mother would get checks from the dairy producers for her cream. It's good cream and so she would take those cheques, not cash them, and put them in the deep freeze. Yeah, the deep freeze. I said, "Mom, why are you putting all these checks in the deep freeze?" "If the house burns down, the contents of the deep freeze will be safe." That's what she told me. I've never burned a house down. I've never experimented with that, but apparently, after the last service, someone said, "Yes, that is true." So, my mother knew what she was talking about. The point is, my mom took all those cheques, put them in the deep freeze. My dad had no idea. No idea. Christmas comes along and we have money for gifts. Financial emergency comes along and my mom has cash. My dad says, "Wow, how'd that work? I must have married some amazing woman." My mother was shrewd. She was shrewd. She knew that if those cheques got in the hands of my dad, it was going some place. It's in the deep freeze until we need it. See, that's an example of shrewdness. That's something that we understand and fully get.

So that's what it is. The master praised the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. Jesus does not praise a steward for his actions or his moral character, but for his shrewdness. His astuteness and his craftiness. There is a difference. Jesus also says, "The sons of this world..." [Those who do not know Christ, who are very connected to the generation that they are in, he says this]: "are more shrewd..." [They're more crafty. They're more astute] "in dealing with the things of their own generation than the sons of the light" [Those who are followers of Christ]. Those in the world and of the world pursue money. It's what we do. It's an objective to secure meanings of peace and security. It's not a bad thing, it's just that that is what we are wired to do. To get money to live. But there is something else here that is going on. There is an eternal game that Jesus is speaking to. He says, "Those are children of the world. They're going after money. This is the sons of Light, the children of Light, the Christians - you have something more and that is souls. Souls for Christ. So, in verse nine he says,

"And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth so that when it fails..." [and money will fail], "they may receive you into eternal dwellings."

There is something about stepping into eternity and having that, which we've invested here on earth, would show up in eternity. There is something very, very powerful and moving about that. The word *unrighteous* (wealth) here, could literally be translated *sinful* or *untrue* or *unjust*. The scriptures are going to define wealth and true riches way different than we do here on this earth. Jesus says, "Look at the world and how they pursue unrighteous wealth for monetary gain. They're good at it. It's part of what we do. It's natural. As faithful followers of Christ, we are to pursue souls and to capture souls for the Kingdom.



[The Preach]

Then we move on to verses 10-15 - The Preach.

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.” [This makes sense. Little, no trust, can’t do much, can’t do much with those.] “So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? [What are the true riches? Souls.] “And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own? No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. The Pharisees...” [Who were eavesdropping], “loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, ‘You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in the sight of God.’”

Little story, big truth. Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, they will welcome you into an eternal life. The dishonest manager used his position at the moment to take care of himself for the future, when he wouldn’t have his job any longer. The message to the disciples, to the Pharisees, and to you and me is: Use your present situation to take care of your future. As we will all give an account to God. We all will give an account to God.

So there’s four things. That was the big truth, and now we’re going to look at four lessons that we’re going to learn from that.

[Four Lessons]

1. Everything I own is on loan

Everything I own is on loan. We’re all managers. We’re all managers of God. In reality we get 70,80,90 years, (some less, some more) to live. We have to manage all the things that we have. It’s not mine to keep, it’s mine to manage. I’ve been given this body by God, for the glory of God, and I must now steward it to that end. I’ve been given a wife. A very attractive, brilliant, beautiful woman of God, who for some unknown reason, God blinded her eyes for six years until she said yes [laughter]. It’s a gift. She’s a gift. I will be held accountable for how I stewarded that gift that God has given me in my wife. I’ve been given four children and I will be held accountable for the raising of my children. It’s my responsibility to impart to them the Word of God. To love God with all their heart and all their soul, with all their mind, with all their strength. I have a little bit of cash. I have a house and a mortgage. I have a few cars - some of which work and some that don’t. A little bit of unrighteous wealth, if you like. I have to steward all of that, manage that. I have a job. Actually I have two jobs. I work at Columbia Bible College and teach there as well. I’ll be answering for being a Youth Pastor here and being a Professor and Columbia Bible College. We live in a world of financial investment. We’re taught now, more than ever, that you prepare for retirement. Will we have enough? We need money now, to work for us then, when we won’t have the ability to work. You’re yearly statements, your personal meetings, all those kind of things. This is all about financial, money, money, money. We’re managers. We’re managers.



Everything I own is on loan. Everything. My marriage, my children, my job, my house, my possessions. Everything I own is on loan. Don't think for a moment that you own any of this. We have to come to that understanding. That's what Jesus is pretty serious --The children of the world believe it's all theirs and it will fade. It will die. It will fall away.

2. Everything I own is either forfeited or forwarded.

Everything I own is either forfeited or forwarded. The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. He commended that. They worked hard at getting that end. An a recent survey in the United States they asked those who made \$35,000 per year and those who made \$100,000 per year what they felt they needed to earn to be comfortable and content in and beyond your working years. The \$35,000 income people said, "We need \$70,000." The \$100,000 income people said, "200,000." It's never enough. It's never enough. It's money, money, money. What would be sufficient? Because if we are like the children of the world, we only have one thing to do and that is to make money so that we can live in peace and comfort and security here on earth. It's money. In 1923, a very important meeting was held in the Edgewater Hotel in Chicago, Illinois. Shortly after the stock market crashed in 1928, the fortunes of many, many people met their end. There were, in attendance at this meeting, eight very, very powerful people. There were bank Presidents, people of the White House, people who own companies, people from the New York Sock Exchange, and Presidents. Many, many powerful men who knew what money was and who knew what power and influence was, as well. 25 years later, those eight men were all dead; either via suicide, running from the law, or released from jail so they could die at home. All of them had lost everything. Everything. You see, these were powerful, rich and very influential people. They had the money, the power and the influence. What was their legacy? We know that the Bible says that it's the love of money that is the root of evil. I get that. Sounds really good and I understand that. I can say that I don't love money. I flirt with money, I snuggle with money, I date money, I like money, but I don't love it. See what we do here? In principle we can agree, but in practice what do we actually do? There's a big, big difference. So what are we going to do? We're not taking it with us. We're just not.

I was a Youth Pastor in Saskatchewan and for many years, in fact, I was the only pastor there for a while, so I actually did funerals too. Any time you put a youth pastor in charge of a funeral, oh boy, you go, "Woo." Anyways, I got to ride from the Church to the graveyard and I got to ride in the hearse. Never had that happen before. I got to ride shotgun in the hearse. So, I thought I'd say, "Okay, Mr. Mortician, let's have a little levity here. You know, this is a dear saint who had passed away, lived a long and wonderful life for Jesus," and all that stuff. I said, "Wouldn't it be cool if we just went through the drive-thru of Tim Horton's and grabbed a coffee and we could kind of go, 'Hey, what do you want? Oh, you can't talk' [laughter]. 'Want a coffee to go?'. Wouldn't that be kind of cool? You know what it is? We aren't taking anything with us. Not even a coffee. You know how we live our lives. "Let's get a coffee to go." We've got *nothing* that is going with us. We either forfeit it or we forward it into souls and all of that. So what's it going to be? Let me be very, very clear here. We did not buy salvation. Salvation comes as a gift, as the grace of God. That is how we are saved. It is through faith by grace that we are saved. It is all there. Understand that. This isn't about giving to God so that we can get blessed financially down here. That is not it at all. This is about understanding that there is an investment in eternity that is going to make a difference. We have to view our wealth as either I am



going to forfeit it all when I die, or I'm going to keep forwarding this as we live here in this earth for the glory of God. That's where we need to be. My reward is in Heaven. I'm a manager of the resources entrusted to me. It is simply not enough to be a devoted follower of Christ without understanding that my money, my wealth, my resources (large or small) all belong to God. I'm a manager of those and I will be held accountable.

What does Jesus mean with this unrighteous wealth? Be generous. Make friends with your unrighteous wealth, with your cash. There's an understanding here that Jesus wants in our wallets. There's nothing wrong with money or wealth, the issue is how you made it and how you spend it. I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that you might, when it fails (and it will fail), you're going to have an impact in eternity. John Piper said, "He is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." He is most glorified in us. What brings me most satisfaction? Hoarding it? Giving it away for the Kingdom of God. For making an impact.

3. Everything in my life has Priority

No servant can serve (be a slave to) two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. It just can't happen. It won't happen. We live in the western world. We're fortunate, we're blessed. We worship time and money here. Time and money. It shows our affections. What we worship shows our affections. What are we fond of? What do we draw close to? Affections determine our allegiance. Affections follow what we value most. Lesser values overwhelm the greater values when our heart is not right with God. Competing values cannot coexist. You and I will be tested on money. We will. There's no question. We will be tested on money. 16 of 38 parables speak to money and possessions. Jesus knew we would struggle with this. One out of eight verses in the Gospels speak about money and possessions. Jesus knew we would struggle. Children of the Light, children of the world. Where are we going to go? You can't chase one without forsaking the other. The problem is the heart. What or who do I love most? Money is a great servant, but a lousy, lousy, God.

4. Cash and Clout is not what life is all about

Lastly (and we'll close here), cash and clout is not what life is all about. The Pharisees had it all wrong. They had it all wrong. They tried to love God and money and it wasn't working. It showed up big time. They heard this story and they sneered at Jesus. That literally means they turned their noses up at him. They had it all wrong, they were lovers of money, they justified their actions, they hardened their hearts to the Kingdom of God. They missed the Gospel message. They had power, they had presence, they had impact, and they were not there. Where's your heart? Where's your heart this morning? C.S. Lewis says this,

"To love a all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully around hobbies, little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable."



This parable is about the heart. The owner of your heart will own your time, your money, your giftedness, and your resources. It will. If you are a tried and tested and true disciple of Jesus Christ, it is not enough that you are devoted, it is not enough that you are dedicated, it is not enough that you are good, but you also must be shrewd using your time, money, giftedness, and resources to make friends who will one day welcome you into eternity. Amen? Amen. Why don't you stand with me and we're going to pray and then the band is going to come and lead us in a couple more songs, but let's pray together and ask the Lord to continue to make that work.

“Father, we're so thankful for your word. Thank you for tough parables that often are meant to be a story to remind us of what is the big important truth here. Lord, I pray that every heart here would want to see more people come to know Christ. That as our wallet and our heart meet, that we would give because we're not taking it with us and we can make a difference for the Kingdom of God. Thank you for the giving that has happened in this church over the years. Thank you for the faithfulness of these people. May it continue to pour out and to bless all that you would want it to be. We thank you God for all that you're going to do. May you make this yours and yours only, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.