

Hurts So Good: *Radical Generosity with Wealth*  
Luke 16:1-14

I'm going to kick off 2024 with my final message in a short series we began several weeks ago called "Hurts So Good"—it's a series where we have looked at the biblical call to radical generosity. We began the series by looking at the heart of radical generosity. The heart of radical generosity is God's radical grace toward us through Jesus Christ. God's radical grace changes us. Knowing and experiencing God's radical, costly grace leads a Christian to become a radically generous person in every domain of life including the way we treat people, the use of our time, the way we extend hospitality...we become radically generous people in every currency of life which is costly...it's often painful...but we become generous towards others because God was so radically generous towards us.

This morning we will wrap up the series by looking at what Jesus says about wealth in one of His most challenging parables found in Luke 16:1-14. Please stand and let us read this parable together:

He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. <sup>2</sup> And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.'<sup>5</sup> So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' <sup>6</sup> He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'<sup>7</sup> Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'<sup>8</sup> The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. <sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> "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. <sup>11</sup> If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? <sup>13</sup> No servant can serve 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."<sup>14</sup> The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.

Now, before we get started, I want you to know that many of the best insights in my sermon come from a message I heard some time ago by Dr. Timothy Keller, who received many of his insights from Jonathan Edwards, and so it goes! I don't have a unique thought in my head--we are always learning from others--but I am particularly grateful for Keller's treatment of this text because it helped me to see a very challenging parable in a way that is not only helpful, but in a way that will stick with me...and hopefully will stick with you...for many years to come. OK, now that I've given credit where credit is due, I will present this message under three subheadings: 1) The Nature of Wealth; 2) A Positive View of Investment; and 3) The Ultimate End of Radical Generosity.

## **I. The Nature of Wealth**

I think it's significant that, in Luke's gospel, Jesus teaches this parable to His disciples immediately after He tells the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Notice that even though Jesus is teaching both parables to His disciples, He is also teaching within earshot of the Pharisees. In Luke 15, having been accused by the Pharisees of 'eating with sinners', Jesus teaches about the radical grace of a father who welcomes home his rebellious son who squandered a third of his father's estate. Here in Luke 16, we get the idea that Jesus is teaching about the stewardship of wealth because as Luke comments in Luke 16:14, "...the Pharisees were lovers of money." Keep that context in mind because, as we've noted on several occasions in this series, the Pharisees represent the very best of religious people in the ancient world. Every story we've looked at in this series features Jesus rebuking and correcting the "good religious people" who...like many of us...often get it wrong and misrepresent God to a watching world.

In the parable we just read, Jesus tells of a wealthy man who had a "manager." We should think of this "manager" as a combination of the COO/CFO responsibilities. This is the guy who not only ran operations for the rich man's business, but he was also the guy responsible for writing up contracts, managing expenses, and investing the Owner's wealth. So, as the story goes, the rich Owner learns from multiple sources that his manager is "wasting his possessions." He calls the manager to give an account of his management and states that, based upon all that he has heard, the manager will soon be relieved of his responsibilities.

The manager panics. He recognizes that he has been caught red-handed, and he accepts the consequences of his poor management. He immediately takes inventory of his life and acknowledges that he is too weak for manual labor, and he would be too ashamed to beg. So, he makes a strategic decision. The manager contacts those people who are indebted to the Master, and he significantly reduces their debt.

Now, what's interesting here is the way Jesus concludes the parable. Jesus states that 'the Master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.'

So...why would the Master commend the manager for his shrewdness? What just happened here? Let me tell you what probably happened and how the first century audience probably heard this story. In the absence of banks, people in the first century would often seek loans from a wealthy landowner, and those loans would be negotiated by the wealthy landowner's manager. If the manager was dishonest, he would work in additional "interest" to the loan to enrich himself. So, in this story, when the manager reduces the amount of debt that these borrowers owed the Master, he is likely taking out his personal cut. The end result would be happy borrowers who would think highly of the Master for reducing their debt and be grateful that the manager made it happen. Now, be that the case or not, the point that Jesus is making is clear because He makes it clear.

In vs. 8-9 Jesus states, “For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. 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.”

The point is that even a worldly manager, when confronted with his poor behavior and mismanagement of funds, is shrewd enough to know he better use whatever wealth and time he has left to invest in friendships that might benefit him in the future. That means denying his tendency to acquire as much wealth as he can in order to invest in future relationships that might give him shelter or a job when it is needed the most.

Jesus points to this parable and essentially says, “The worldly people get this, but you guys...the sons of light...you’re missing it.” I think it’s clear that Jesus expects His followers to not only understand this principle, but to be even more perceptive about the nature of wealth than those who are worldly.

So, what can we learn about the nature of wealth according to this parable? I will make three quick observations.

First, the consistent picture that we find throughout the biblical witness is again presented here in Luke 16: All wealth ultimately belongs to God, who is the Owner. All of us are managers of wealth that does not belong to us.

Now, I suspect some of you are offended by that statement because you truly believe that your wealth is a direct result of your hard work and sacrifices. Please know that I get hard work and sacrifice...very few people in life can enjoy wealth without hard work and sacrifice...but consider this simple observation: we are only able to work hard and make sacrifices because we have good health and a sound mind. Who is responsible for your good health? God is.

Church, everything in this fallen world is unravelling. By the time we are 22 years old, we have begun the slow and painful process of decay. Sickness, disease, and death fall upon people of all ages and stages, regardless of lifestyle. If we have been allowed to work hard and acquire wealth, it is only because God has made it possible for us to do. Your bright mind and able body are a gift that you cannot take any credit for.

Let us also consider God’s providence in where we were born, who our parents were, what educational opportunities were available for us, and so on. We could have been born in many places on earth where our hard work would not have earned us the opportunity to enjoy the wealth that we now enjoy. Everything you have...everything you are...every advantage that has been provided...all of it has been given to you by God. Only God is the Owner...we are all managers. As David states in 1 Chronicles 29 “...all that is in the heavens and the earth is yours...both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all...who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.”

The second point we need to see is this: If we fail to invest the Owner's wealth as He directs, we are not simply guilty of being prudish or selfish...we are, in fact, stealing from God. We are guilty of robbery. In Malachi 3 God accuses Israel of robbery because they have withheld their tithe:

Will man rob from God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse..."

In the Jewish mind, the biblical worldview of wealth went something like this: We are managers of the Owner who has entrusted a certain amount of His wealth to us to manage. As His managers, we are to invest ten percent of HIS wealth into His business and then we have the privilege to live off the 90% of whatever remains, always remembering that 100% of that which we have been given belongs to the Owner. So, if we are wasting the Owner's money, or we fail to invest our tithe into His Kingdom business, we are robbing God of what is rightfully His.

Now, if that's not bad enough, the third and final point here is that we are all dishonest managers. Sin has corrupted the heart of all people, and particularly the sin of greed. Paul says that the love of money is the root of many evils, and we all know that is true. Money alone does not make us evil, but money empowers and intensifies those things that would make us evil. For example, let's just say for a moment that I have an unhealthy obsession with fishing. If I'm a poor man, that obsession with fishing may lead me to call in sick and skip work from time to time, but not too often because I can't afford to skip work and still eat. I do most of my fishing from the bank because I can't afford a boat or a truck to pull the boat. However, if I suddenly get a windfall of cash, I can now afford to skip work more often. I can take that money and buy a truck and a boat and maybe a lake house. Now, instead of spending one day of the weekend fishing and the rest of the weekend with my family going to church, now I'm running down to the lake house every weekend to fish tournaments. Whereas I once gave a little money to the church, now all my money goes into renovating the lake house or repairing the engine on my boat or putting new tires on the boat trailer. You see...money didn't make me evil...I was already obsessed with fishing...but money empowered and intensified my obsession. This is regularly the effect money has on us when we steal from God, which is another reason why God is so insistent that we manage His wealth according to His Word.

Listen: regardless of how much wealth we have acquired, we would all do well to identify with the dishonest manager rather than justifying ourselves as though we have been 100% faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us. None of us have been perfectly faithful as managers...but Jesus makes it clear that we will all be accountable. A day will come when our management responsibilities will be taken away from us, and we will be called to give an account. That thought alone is horrifying, which is why I want you to remember that Jesus taught this parable immediately after the Parable of the Prodigal Son!

Remember...we are not only managers, we are also sons and daughters of God who have been saved by God's immeasurable grace! The curse spoken of in Malachi has been broken by the

blood of Christ. Jesus became the perfect manager who gave up all His wealth to make reconciliation possible between unfaithful managers and the Master. It is by the blood of Jesus on a Roman cross that we “prodigals” and “dishonest managers” can be rescued from the punishment we deserve. Church: Our salvation is not dependent on our management of God’s resources. However, our management of God’s resources should reflect our gratitude for God’s unmerited, radical grace that saved us when we could not save ourselves.

So, as shoddy managers who, by the grace of the Owner, have been forgiven and provided a little time to make some changes in the way that we manage His estate, let us look to our second subheading...

## **II. A Positive View of Investment**

Jesus provides a positive view of investment here in the text. Did you see it? Look again at vs. 9, “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.”

Now...what is Jesus saying here? Is He saying, “Buy friends, not boats?” Is Jesus really suggesting that we purchase friendships?

I think it’s helpful to review other things that Jesus said about money and “treasures” because it will help us understand this positive view of investment.

Remember what Jesus said earlier in Luke 12: Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

When we think about what Jesus said earlier in the gospel of Luke, it seems clear that Jesus equates investment in relationships as the heavenly treasure we are to store up in heaven. The treasure of our hearts is to be love for God and love for our neighbor...not money or earthly possessions.

Listen Church: money doesn’t last. Earthly possessions don’t last. Lake houses and cars and your 401k won’t last...but here’s what Jesus is saying: relationships last. Friendships last. Love endures... “love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:8). People go on, and when we invest in people...when we invest in souls...that investment is one that we will enjoy for an eternity.

Think about the very heart of the Gospel that we all learned as our very first Bible memory verse in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, He gave us His Son...” What was God investing in? Relationships. People. Friendships that He will enjoy for all eternity. The whole story of the Gospel is how God sent His Son to sacrificially, generously transform enemies into friends. That investment was costly. Jesus gave up His glory; He gave up all the riches of heaven; He even gave up His life on a Roman cross to convince us of the Father’s love...to call us to enduring, eternal friendship with the Trinity and with our forever family in heaven.

So, it stands to reason that whatever wealth God has entrusted to us as His managers, He would prioritize investment in relationships, right? When we invest in Kingdom ministry, we are

investing in human souls. We are investing God's resources to demonstrate to a hostile, lost, hurting culture that God sees them and loves them. Just as the borrowers in the parable would be shocked and delighted to discover that their debt was reduced by the Owner, how much more will those indebted to God be shocked and overwhelmed with gratitude to discover that their debt has been paid in full! Church, when we think about giving our tithe, should we not equate that investment with making friends for ourselves who we will enjoy in heaven for all eternity? Is not our tithe and faithful giving an ongoing expression of the Gospel to those who are perishing? Can you see why your radical generosity is critical to God's mission in the world? The Father wills that none would perish. He has sought to acquire friends of His alienated creation by the deepest, most painful investment a Father could ever make...His only Son. However, for the world to know and experience the radical grace of God, someone has to share that story with them. In order to share that story, we'll have to earn trust by meeting some needs. We'll need to raise up teachers and preachers and missionaries. We'll need to invest in this ministry of reconciliation so that every tribe, tongue and nation has the opportunity to experience the radical generosity of God through the radical generosity of His Church...the Body of Christ!

Therefore, let us not be lovers of money, but lovers of people...let us prioritize and invest in those whom Jesus died to save and befriend. Let us invest in making friends, because those redeemed relationships will last...and one day, those relationships will be perfect. That leads to my final subheading...

### **III. The End of Radical Generosity**

I want to close with a quick fishing story. My wife blessed me to go fishing a few days ago on New Years Day so that we could have some fresh fish for dinner with her family. Towards the end of the day, having caught my limit of crappie, I was enjoying my last 30 minutes of fishing for fun when three men in a small boat anchored close by. These men, who were clearly struggling to catch a fish, were of Hispanic origin, and only one of them spoke any English at all. As I sat just feet away from their boat, catching a fish every few minutes, I could feel their frustration at catching nothing. I tried to communicate with them. I showed them where to anchor their boat. I tried to communicate how deep the fish were holding. I tried to show them what lure I was using. I tried to explain to them that what they were doing was not going to work in 39 degree water. They looked at me and smiled...appreciative that I was trying to help but frustrated that we could not communicate adequately. Eventually they pulled up and went back to the boat ramp. Not long afterwards I also returned to the ramp. As I made my way to the truck, one of the young men who spoke a little English asked me how I did, and I said I caught plenty. He asked if I would show him again what I was using, which I was glad to do. Knowing I had more than enough for dinner, I asked him if they wanted some fish, and he gladly accepted. I went back to the boat, gave the man and his friends a few of my "secret" lures, demonstrated how to use the lures, and then gave them ten of the fish I had caught.

Now...everything about that exchange was pretty transactional on my part. I was the giver, they were the receivers. I was the one in the know, they were the students. That is, until the young man asked for my name! I don't know why that shocked me so much, but it did. I smiled and

said, “My name is Jim. What’s your name?” His name was Carlos, and immediately I could see that he was a young man who desired friendship, not just fish. I was immediately embarrassed and frustrated at my foolish arrogance. I had been viewing these guys as poor Hispanic men who didn’t know what they were doing...but now I knew a man named Carlos who was very kind, with a nice smile, who was interested in knowing me. We chatted a bit more about what we did for a living, but our ability to communicate was very limited. I eventually gave him my card, we shook hands, and then we got in our trucks and went our separate ways.

Now, why did I tell you that story? Well, I’ve been thinking a lot about that exchange, even as I’ve been reflecting on an entire week of hosting 14 people in our home over the holidays. Both experiences...my experience with Carlos at the boat ramp, and my experience of having all those people in my home for a week...both experiences revealed to me how frustratingly horrible I am at loving people in this broken world.

I would have enjoyed more time with Carlos and his friends, but the language barrier made it almost impossible to communicate. I was also embarrassed and frustrated by my tendency to be arrogant and condescending. On a similar note, I truly love my in-laws, my family, and my wife...but my selfishness, pride, irritability, insecurity, and general grumpiness constantly frustrate my attempts to love well the people whom I cherish the most.

As I thought about it, being generous with 10 fish in a bucket better communicated my love for those three guys than any words I could muster. Serving a fresh fish dinner that I caught, cleaned and prepared was a far more effective way of communicating my love for my family than my overly competitive, impatient countenance at the card game later that night. And so it goes with my efforts at love and generosity. I never get it right...it’s always messy...it’s always costly...it’s often painful...my motives are often questionable, and in the end even the little good that I do leaves me regretting all the good I failed to do. Can anyone relate with me?

In this life, to love people is to experience painful frustration. None of us really love well those we cherish the most. We try to...we wish we could love them like we deeply want to...but our sinful limitations make loving another person feel like trying to push the ocean through a garden hose. The same is true for our love of God. We long to please God; we long to spend time with Him and worship Him in spirit and truth...but our broken, distracted, sin-obsessed minds and bodies constantly sabotage our best efforts at faithfulness.

I think Jesus perfectly understood our situation, and I think Jesus is showing us something radically important here this morning.

Listen to what He said: “Invest in relationships that are, in the end, eternal.” Invest now so that when this life fails...and it will fail...you will be received...welcomed...anticipated by those who will be with you in eternal dwellings.”

Church, we must never underestimate the value of eternal relationships because our relationships then will not suffer the same frustrating qualities of our relationships now. “For now,” writes Paul in 1 Cor. 13, “now we see dimly, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” Perfect love is coming, but we should not expect to experience it in this life.

In this life our relationships suffer from so many things. Our relationships suffer from selfishness. Our relationships suffer because we want to be loved for who we are, not what people can get out of us. Our relationships suffer from a lack of mutuality. Our relationships suffer because people die, and their absence rips a hole in our heart that never heals. We experience so many frustrations in our relationships that we are tempted to walk away from relationships altogether...but Jesus says: invest deeply in those relationships. Don't give up. Invest in people with radical generosity...even those people who hate you. Invest your time; invest your hospitality; invest your forgiveness; invest your dollars...invest in people, because one day you will enjoy those relationships in a way you never thought possible in this life. Every seed of investment will yield a harvest of love...a pure and perfect love unmarred by selfishness, pride, the lack of mutuality, or even death itself.

Church: one day we will love and be loved perfectly...not only by our family, friends, and fellow believers...but we shall love and be loved perfectly in our relationship to God. We shall see Jesus face to face, and we will finally be home.

Don't lose sight of the goal. This world is not our home. Even our best days and our best relationships are a shadow...a small foretaste of what is to come. Invest now in relationships that are eternal. Invest now in souls who are enemies of God that they may become friends that we will enjoy for all eternity. Invest God's wealth in those people...in those ministries...in those lost souls that God longs to bring home. Be radically generous, because the end of radical generosity is perfect, eternal love.

Let us pray.