

Sermon followed by Service

February 25, 2024 - God-Lived Life – 4

Luke 16:1-15

It's a head-scratcher, isn't it? So many questions. Questions that don't matter, like - If the master was firing his business manager for wasting his money, why did he give him more time to cheat him? And questions that do matter - Why did the master commend his cheating business manager? What does Jesus mean by "use money to gain friends to welcome you into heaven"? What does Jesus mean by "you cannot serve both God and mammon" and "What is valued highly by men is detested by God"? Oh, and there's another important question, isn't there? Where do you see yourself in this story?

A wealthy businessman had a business manager accused of wasting the business owner's money. The business owner fires his business manager, but first, the business manager needs to give an accounting.

So far, who do you want to be in this story? We don't want to be the business owner, do we? I imagine most all of us have had someone cheat us. And it hurts. We give someone an opportunity, we trust them, and they cheat us. It hurts; it makes us angry - angry and hurt. We understand why that business owner would be angry, don't we? We don't want to be him.

And we don't want to face him. That would be the business manager, trusted with the owner's business, trusted with the owner's riches. He could have had it really good. But what

do we hear? He's wasted the money entrusted to him. He cheated his boss. And now he's fired, and on the line to have to give an account. We don't want to be him, do we? We don't want to be fired. And the thought of having to give account for the money God has entrusted to me ... the thought of having to give account for the work that God has entrusted to me - it sets me on edge, makes me feel tight and twisted inside. What I see undone, what he sees undone; what I see wasted, what he sees wasted - it sets me on edge, wondering, waiting - "how, when will the hammer drop?" How, when will we have to give account?

We want to hear Jesus say something soft and comfortable about money and money management, don't we? No, we want to hear Jesus say something soft and comfortable about money and money mismanagement. But Jesus doesn't. Remember, he's the Jesus who looked forward to the cross and said to his disciples: **"Deny yourselves." "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."** And here what does Jesus say? **"You cannot serve both God and Money."** I prefer that old word "mammon"; Jesus isn't just talking about money; he's talking about stuff and the moneyd life. "You cannot serve both God and stuff; you cannot serve both God and the moneyd life." **"If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"** If God can't trust us with \$100, or \$1, why would God trust us with something that really matters? **"God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight."** The things of this world that people long for and chase after, God thinks of them as an abomination.

Makes us wonder, doesn't it? How often does God see us squandering his money to chase after what he thinks is worthless, and worse than worthless? How, when will the hammer drop?

In our lesson, we hear the hammer drop - the business manager was fired - with more to come - now he has to give account. So what does he do? He doesn't try to make things right his boss. Instead, he turns to the world, to make friends with the world. If cheating his boss had gotten him into trouble, he figures that cheating his boss could get him out of his trouble. Once we get into a rut, it's hard to get out of that rut, isn't it?. It's so easy to think that what got us into trouble is what we can use to get out of trouble. So, if playing fast and loose with his boss's money had gotten himself into trouble, he figured playing fast and loose with his boss's money just might make it easier for him to get out of his trouble.

How did it work out for him? That's not a question Jesus answers, at least not directly. Instead, Jesus gets us scratching our heads. Jesus has the cheated business owner commending, praising, his cheating business manager. What did Jesus say? **“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.”** And we scratch our heads: What's up with that? Did you notice? The master didn't commend and praise his manager for cheating him. The master didn't say the manager did right. Instead the master commended his manager as shrewd. The manager saw a problem, and he got right after doing something to fix it. More specifically, the manager realized he could use money to make connections that could help him - and he got right after it.

Then did you notice what Jesus did? He moved on from his “business” story so no one would be tempted to write a book: “Jesus Teaches Top Ten Lessons for Business People.” Jesus moved on from his business story to his heavenly point: **“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”** The cheating business manager used money (that wasn’t his) to make connections, to make friends, so he would be welcomed here in this world. Jesus takes it up a notch - use money to make connections, to make friends, who will welcome you into heaven.

Here’s the lesson Jesus has for us. Use the money God has given you for a purpose - Not just for yourselves, but for others. Not just for here and now, but for forever. In other words, use the money God has given you - not just as yours for your purposes, but as God's for God's purposes.

We hear that and what? There's that two year old in us that shouts and tantrums: "No, it's mine!" But we aren't ruled by the two-year-old in us, are we? We have Jesus and his Spirit in us. And with Jesus and his Spirit, the thought of putting God's money to God's purposes doesn't leave us feeling cheated or victimized; we are excited.

It’s so neat to think about, isn’t it? Last week our mission festival speaker told us how we - with our offerings - are sharing Jesus in a part of the world known for trying to silence Jesus. Think about it, as we put God’s money to God’s work with our offerings, we will have people welcoming us into heaven who were at one time Taliban. We will have people welcoming us

into heaven who were at one time locked up as slaves. Or closer to home, we will have people welcoming us into heaven because they got to know Jesus here or in our school. Or out and about, you will have people welcoming you into heaven because you showed them kindness, not just in words, but you put God's money to work to show kindness, and that had them wanting to know the Jesus in your heart. Yes, we will have people welcoming us into heaven, many of whom we will have never met before, but your offerings here are making it possible for people on the other side of the world - or on the other side of that wall (in school) - or out and about Your offerings here and your kindnesses out there are making it possible for people to hear about Jesus, and some day they will welcome you into heaven. Sounds good, doesn't it?

So who do you want to be in Jesus' story? Not the cheated business owner. Not the cheating business manager waiting to give account, waiting for the hammer to drop. How about this - the one Jesus is including. He includes us with a warning for the two year old inside us. You remember that two year old shouting: "No, it's mine." He's not happy, is he? But we don't have to live the life of a two year old. Jesus has included us in his grace; he's included us in his purpose. **"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."**

What does that mean for us? We don't have to live waiting for a hammer to drop, because the hammer has already dropped, driving the nails into Jesus' hands and feet. There on the cross,

Jesus was hung out with nothing to his name but your guilt, our guilt and shame. There Jesus was hung out with nothing to hold on to but God's promise and his love for you. There Jesus gave account for you and for me, and that whole world. There he paid the price - not with cash or credit, but with his life and death.

Why? So God can see you and include you - not as someone who cheated him, but as forgiven full and free. So God can include you - not under the hammer - but in heaven. So God can include you - not with the cheaters - but with those he trusts with his riches.

So who do you want to be in Jesus' story? Who do we want to be? The ones Jesus includes. The ones sharing Jesus' heart. The ones Jesus trusts, right?! Amen!

February 24 & 25, 2024

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we are surrounded by so much money and stuff. So much money and stuff squandered. So much money and stuff tempting. So much money and stuff leaving hearts empty and unsatisfied. So much money and stuff put to work by selfish cravings and ungodly wants. And so much money and stuff given and put to work by God to bless us.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... the Lord who gives us money and stuff gives us his wisdom and his purpose for money and stuff - and we are blessed!

OPENING HYMN

"Speak, O Savior, I Am Listening"

Hymn 631

Speak, O Savior, I am list'ning, as a servant to his lord.
Let me show respect and honor to your holy, precious Word,
that each day, my whole life through, I may serve and follow you.
Let your Word e'er be my pleasure and my heart's most precious treasure.

Oh, what blessing to be near you and to listen to your voice;
let me ever love and fear you, let your Word still be my choice!
Many hardened sinners, Lord, flee in terror at your Word;
but to all who feel sin's burden you give peace and words of pardon.

Lord, your words are waters living where I quench my thirsty needs.
Lord, your words are bread life-giving; on your words my spirit feeds.
Lord, your words will be my light thro' death's cold and dreary night;
yes, they are my sword prevailing and my cup of joy unailing.

As I pray, dear Jesus, hear me; let your words in me take root.
May your Spirit e'er be near me that I bear abundant fruit.
May I daily sing your praise, from my heart glad anthems raise,
till my highest praise is given in the endless joy of heaven.

I rejoiced with those who said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Lord.”

How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty!
Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy;
in your faithfulness and righteousness, come to my relief.

Spare us, Lord, from the lies of the devil and the attacks of our conscience.
Comfort and save us in your patient compassion.
Have mercy on us, Jesus.

Guide us, Lord, to the wisdom of your Word and the power of your
promises. Take away our confusion and doubt.
Have mercy on us, Jesus.

Hear us, Lord, when we come to you in prayer. Make us confident to take
you at your word and to follow you in faith.
Have mercy on us, Jesus.

Empower us, Lord, to walk in your ways and live in your truth. Fill us with
your love, that we may love you and one another.
Have mercy on us, Jesus.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us
so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins
and was raised to life for our justification.

Death has been swallowed up in victory!

Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Silence for meditation and reflection

Almighty God, grant to your Church the Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes from above. Let nothing hinder your Word from being freely proclaimed to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, so that we may serve you in steadfast faith and confess your name as long as we live; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Acts 20:35

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

GOSPEL

Luke 16:1–15

Jesus tells a parable about a shrewd manager to make the single point that a God-lived life uses its resources for God's purposes.

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 cannot be manager any longer.'

"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— I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

"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.'

"Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

" 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

“He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

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

“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. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 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 will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

The Pharisees, who 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 God’s sight.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

“Forgive Us, Lord, for Shallow Thankfulness”

Hymn 754

Forgive us, Lord, for shallow thankfulness,
for dull content with warmth and sheltered care,
for songs of praise for worldly wealthiness,
while of your richer gifts we’re unaware:

Teach us to thank you, Lord, for love and grace,
for life and vision, for a purpose clear,
for Christ, your Son, and for each human face
that shows your message ever new and near.

Forgive us, Lord, for selfish thanks and praise,
for words that speak at variance with deeds;
forgive our thanks for walking pleasant ways,
unmindful of a broken brother's needs:

Teach us, O Lord, true thankfulness divine,
that gives as Christ gave, never counting cost,
that knows no barrier of "yours" and "mine,"
assured that only what's withheld is lost.

Forgive us, Lord, for feast that knows not fast,
for joy in things that meanwhile starve the soul,
for walls and wars that hide your mercies vast
and blur our vision of the kingdom goal:

Open our eyes to see your love's intent,
to know with mind and heart its depth and height;
let thankful days in loving labor spent
reflect the truly Christlike life and light.

SERMON

Luke 16:1-15

BIBLE STUDY

1 Timothy 6:6-19

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you

made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

INTO THE TEXT

1. Verse 10 is one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. Some have said: “Money is the root of all evil.” Others have said: “Money is the root of all kinds of evil.” What does verse 10 actually say? Prove that money is not evil.

When Paul talks of “the love of money,” how do we know that Paul has something more in mind than coin, cash, and checks?

2. In verse 11, Paul tells Timothy to flee from “all this” (i.e., the love of money) and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

What does it mean to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness?

How would you picture someone fleeing the love of money?

3. In verses 12-14, Paul points us ahead to eternal life and the coming of Jesus. How does Paul's eternal perspective help us to flee from the love and money and to pursue righteousness?

4. In verses 17-19, Paul lists two dangers when God blesses someone with wealth and then describes the best way to use your wealth. Identify the two dangers and how one should use their wealth?

APPLYING IT

1. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Jesus in Acts 20:35)
 - How is this true?

 - How does God seek to prove it's true?

 - How do you seek to show it's true?

2. Martin Luther said that money must be the least of all God's gifts because he even gives it to fools. What truth was Luther trying to make about money and its place?

 3. How do purpose and contentment fit together?

 4. How is godliness with contentment great gain?
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HYMN

"My Worth Is Not in What I Own"

Hymn 753

My worth is not in what I own, not in the strength of flesh and bone,
but in the costly wounds of love at the cross.

My worth is not in skill or name, in win or lose, in pride or shame,
but in the blood of Christ that flowed at the cross.

Refrain

I rejoice in my Redeemer—greatest treasure, wellspring of my soul.
I will trust in him, no other; my soul is satisfied in him alone.

As summer flow'rs we fade and die; fame, youth, and beauty hurry by.
But life eternal calls to us at the cross.

I will not boast in wealth or might, or human wisdom's fleeting light.
But I will boast in knowing Christ at the cross. *Refrain*

Two wonders here that I confess: my worth and my unworthiness.
My value fixed — my ransom paid at the cross. *Refrain*

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

M: Almighty Father, you are my Lord. You give us our time, energy, talents, and treasures. Because of you we can say with the psalmist, “apart from you I have no good thing.” Your Word teaches us of your great love for us and how to share your love by loving our neighbor. Give us wisdom in using your gifts in God-pleasing ways. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Lord Jesus Christ, you tell us that “what people value highly is detestable in God’s sight.” Help us to recognize our true treasure in you, our Savior and our God. Protect us from the devil who would have us marvel at insignificant things as a treasure, while neglecting the great gifts you give us in your Word and Sacraments. Give us wisdom in cherishing you and your greater gifts in God-pleasing ways. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Holy Spirit, you have set us apart and made our bodies your temple. You live in us. Your Word teaches us who we really are by the grace of God and through the innocent suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Give us wisdom to see that godliness with contentment is great gain and grow in us the fruit that is pleasing to you Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

Special prayers and intercessions may follow.

M: Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private petitions.

Silent prayer.

M: Accept our prayers for the sake of Jesus our Savior. Help us to not be arrogant nor put our hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but help us put our hope in you, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment, for Jesus, our Savior's sake. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Blessed Lord, you have given us your Holy Scriptures for our learning. May we so hear them, read, learn, and take them to heart that, being strengthened and comforted by your holy Word, we may cling to the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

BLESSING

The almighty and merciful Lord—the Father, the T Son, and the Holy Spirit—bless us and keep us.

Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

"What Is the World to Me"

Hymn 717

What is the world to me with all its vaunted pleasure
when you and you alone, Lord Jesus, are my treasure!
You only, dearest Lord, my soul's delight shall be;
you are my peace, my rest. What is the world to me!

The world seeks after wealth and all that money offers,
yet never is content though gold should fill its coffers.
I have a higher good, content with it I'll be;
my Jesus is my wealth. What is the world to me!

The world is like a cloud and like a vapor fleeting,
a shadow that declines, swift to its end retreating.
My Jesus shall remain, though all things fade and flee,
my everlasting rock. What is the world to me!

What is the world to me! My Jesus is my treasure,
my life, my health, my wealth, my friend, my love, my pleasure,
my joy, my crown, my all, my bliss eternally.
Once more then I declare: What is the world to me!

OFFERING

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The God-Lived Life - A Life Lived Shrewdly Manage with Intention

The God-Lived Life is a Challenge.

- For some, it may be a challenge to change, a challenge to repent and live the new life God has for us.
- For some, it may be a challenge to step out and live differently than the rest of their world.
- For all of us, it is a challenge to grow in living with the heart and mind of our God!

Over the past year, we have heard God challenge us to live in his Word, to serve his church and his world, to love beyond family and friends. Now we hear God challenge us to A Life Lived Shrewdly, a life where we manage God's blessings with intention and attention with the heart and mind of Christ! Below are four challenges. Which will you accept?:

Challenge #1

Commit to Financial Self-Awareness and "Intentionality"

- Do we know where "our" money is going, or even how much money God is entrusting to us?
- How do we determine how we will spend, save, use the money God is entrusting to us?
 - Do we rely on our "feel"?
 - Do we simply respond to our "needs," wants, whims?
 - Do we put God's money to work with intention and attention to the wonderful life-saving, life-changing, life-enriching purposes God has for the money he gives us?

Let's Check our Financial Self-Awareness and "Intentionality"

A Two-Number Test

#1 - How much money is God entrusting to you this year? _____
(Salary, retirement funds, ...) (Not sure about this year? Use last year's numbers.)

#2 - How much money are you giving back for the Lord's work? _____
Bonus # - What percent is that? ($\#2 \div \#1$) _____

Thinking of what God is giving you, what would you expect God to say to you?
Why?

"Well done, good and faithful servant!" - Matthew 25

"Excel, stretch, grow in the grace of giving!" - 2 Corinthians 8

"Repent, and see if I don't throw open the flood gates of heaven." - Malachi 3

Another Two-Number Test

#1 - How much money is God entrusting to you this year? _____
(Salary, retirement funds, ...)

#2 - How much money do you spend on entertainment? _____

Thinking of what God is giving you, what would you expect God to say to you?
Why?

"Well done, good and faithful servant!" - Matthew 25

"Excel, stretch, grow in the grace of giving!" - 2 Corinthians 8

"Repent, and see if I don't throw open the flood gates of heaven." - Malachi 3

A Comprehensive Check for Self-Awareness and Intentionality

Create / Review your Budget (Giving / Saving / Spending Plan)

We have paper forms available for tech-less freedom. You can find other tools, forms, and apps through your financial institution or Financial Peace University at RamseySolutions.com.

Challenge #2

Commit to a gift or new level of giving in our new era of ministry

- God has answered our prayers for a new Principal / Staff Minister of Outreach. Thank you, Lord! Now, how will we respond to God's answer to our prayers?
- Our Illinois Invest in Kinds tuition scholarship program has come to an end. How will we meet the opportunities God brings to us?

The God-Lived Life is not first or most about money for ministry (as good as money for ministry is). The God-Lived Life is first and foremost about encouraging the hearts of God's people to think and to live in the promises of God with the heart of God. With God's heart, we see God blessing us and stretching us with a new era in ministry. How will we respond?

Challenge #3

Create/update my will, perhaps include support of God's work

- Do you have an estate plan or will? If you don't and you have no family and no stuff, an estate plan may not be a priority. But if you do have family or earthly possessions, then an estate plan could possibly save your family distress, and turn your possessions into blessings for people and/or ministry you care about.
- Do you already have an estate plan? When was the last time you reviewed it? Is it still up-to-date? Have you considered including Jesus in your estate plan?

Challenge #4

Join us for our Estate Planning Workshop on March 17

On Sunday, March 17, our WELS Giving Counselors will be at St. John for a Planned Giving and Estate Planning Workshop. Not only are they helpful in arranging estate plans and tax-wise giving to the Lord, but they are also very helpful in arranging estate plans that look out for our loved ones. They aren't looking to get for themselves or anyone else; they are looking to help us give and provide with the heart of our Father. Please, bring your questions.

Join Us For Wednesday Evening Lent Worship!

God on Trial

Wednesday, February 28, at 3:30 and 6:30: Restraint

- **Lent Supper at 4:30, served by Team Jeanne Thies and Tim Kalter**

Wednesday, March 6, at 3:30 and 6:30: Testimony

- **Lent Supper at 4:30, served by Team PTP**

Wednesday, March 13, at 3:30 and 6:30: Misconceptions

- **Lent Supper at 4:30, served by Team L'Esperance**

Wednesday, March 20, at 3:30 and 6:30: Truth

- **Lent Supper at 4:30, served by Team Haefke**

We welcome Rev. David Carlovsky from Lord and Savior in Crystal Lake on February 28.

Thank you to our Lent Dinner Hosts! Please feel free to offer your help, bring a dessert...