

“Money Talks”

Luke 16:1-13

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

September 22, 2013

There is widespread consent this is the most intriguing parable Jesus told. It leaves almost everyone who studies it scratching his or her head wondering what Jesus meant, which is the purpose of a good parable, according to Welsh scholar and Cambridge professor, C. H. Dodd. Parables are meant to tease us and make us think, Dodd believed. If this is true, then this parable certainly succeeded.

So bewildering is this parable that Luke added other statements by Jesus about the proper relationship between a believer and his possessions. You almost get the feeling he did so as a way of protecting Jesus from his critics, which were probably as vocal when Luke was writing as they were when Jesus told this parable. Let's look at this thought-provoking parable and see how it speaks to us today.

It opens up with charges being brought against the manager of a rich man's business. He was accused of squandering the resources he was assigned to manage. No doubt you hear echoes of the actions of the Prodigal Son in the previous parable. He, too, squandered his wealth.

When the manager was called in to give an account of his decisions, he was told that he was going to lose his job. This struck fear in his heart as he thought about being unemployed.

Again, like the Prodigal Son, he talked to himself about his options. He knew he was not physically able to dig, and he had too much pride to beg, so he had to figure out something else.

In his desperation, he decided to reduce the debt of two of his master's clients while they thought he was still in the service of the rich man, thus gaining their favor. It appears he was banking on one or both of these debtors befriending him after he was fired, providing him with a new job.

Once again, this story is similar to the previous parable because the response of the rich man to this manager's indiscretion was as surprising as the father's reaction to the return of the

Prodigal. When the owner discovered what the manager had done to take care of himself after he was fired, he did not get angry or condemn him. Instead, he seemed to be quite impressed with this manager's clever scheme and praised him for it. You have to wonder if he reconsidered his decision to fire the dishonest manager.

All seems fairly understandable at this point in the parable. Desperate people do desperate things. We know this. It is the next part of the story that is perplexing.

"And his master commended the dishonest business manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are shrewder in their dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone they may welcome you into the eternal homes" Luke 16:8-9.

What's the meaning of this compliment and advice? For starters, scholars are not sure if this is a part of the parable, the words of Jesus or Luke's interpretation.

To be honest with you, I'm not sure how to interpret this portion of our text. The sources I consulted raised more questions about it than answers. I understand the confusion. It is baffling to say the least.

Perhaps it is a commentary on the importance of relationships as a hedge against adversity, hence the need to make good friends. Seize every opportunity to build a support system so you will never be alone in a scary and dangerous world.

Maybe it was meant to teach the early believers if this man could make his situation better by scratching and clawing his way out of a mess without asking for God's help, how much more could they make a bad situation better by seeking God's guidance?

Was this Jesus or Luke's way of encouraging the early disciples to be shrewd, clever, wise, smart and practical as they lived out their faith? After all, solving problems, being productive and achieving goals were traits everyone needed to master.

Quite frankly, the meaning of these words could be a combination of all three or none of these. Feel free to share your ideas with me Wednesday night in Prayer Meeting when we'll discuss this further.

In the meantime, let me move on beyond this part of the passage and look at the broader picture. **What does this parable say to us this morning?**

For me, it is this. The way we use what we have will reveal a lot about us. The use of our resources, talents, skills, influence, power and opportunities will reveal our true character and what is important to us.

What do you think was important to the manager in the parable Jesus told? It appears his well-being was at the top of his list.

I get the feeling life was all about him, and he was willing to do whatever was necessary to get what he wanted. When he talked to himself about how to get out of the mess he created by being dishonest, he used a lot of personal pronouns, seven in all, which indicates he operated entirely out of self-interest.

There was no mention of how the manager's irresponsible behavior would impact anyone other than himself. He never mentioned his family or community, much less the man who had given him this job and had so much confidence in him.

Neither was there a hint of confession, repentance, or a desire to make things right by going to his boss and asking how he could make restitution. His woe-is-me soliloquy was all about his fears, anxieties, embarrassment and plans.

How do you feel about people like this? Do you want to be friends with people who are self-absorbed? Do you want to go into business with them? Do you even want to associate with them? I didn't think so.

Do you think anyone feels this way about you? One thing greed and selfishness do is blind us so we cannot see ourselves as others see us. In turn, we become isolated and wonder why people don't come around.

Has this ever happened to you? Could it be occurring now?

What advice do you think Jesus would have for you and all of us today? I pondered this question last week and wondered if it might be this.

It is possible to take care of ourselves and care for other people. We don't have to decide between the two. This is not an either/or proposition.

All of us have a responsibility to work hard and be good managers of what we earn. There is nothing wrong with ambition and goals. Healthy communities are built upon them and the people who achieve them.

Healthy communities are also built upon the same people being honest, trustworthy, compassionate, generous and unselfish. This should especially be true of those who follow Christ and are called to serve others above self.

Jesus refused to turn money or possessions into gods and look to them for security or happiness. His peace of mind came through relationships when he opened his life to others, walked alongside them, listened to their stories and helped them with their struggles.

Words of encouragement and hope were the currency he valued more than gold, and making new friends was more important to him than amassing a fortune. He did not come to build his own kingdom but God's, and he died trying to make the world better for all people.

What a contrast this mindset and lifestyle are to our culture where people buy what they don't need, trample over others to get what they want, and hoard what they will never use. Our obsession with more almost dismantled our economy five years ago and destroyed our country. If we don't learn from our mistakes, it may happen yet.

I don't want to live in a world where people care only about themselves. I don't think you do either.

Given our insatiable appetite for more, caring for others and their welfare is not easy. Our instinct is to look out for number one and do whatever is necessary to get what we want.

We must be transformed to care for others. It doesn't come naturally; self-preservation does. This is why faith is about self-awareness and change.

Is there a better example of this kind of transformation than Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in another of Luke's parables? (Luke 19:1-10) He certainly took care of himself at the expense of others. He was anything but honest and generous.

However, all of this changed after he met Jesus. After their private conversation, Zacchaeus informed Jesus he would give half his possessions to the poor, and if he had stolen from anyone, he would repay four times the amount taken. That's a real change of heart and behavior.

What do you think Jesus said to Zacchaeus over dinner? We don't know, but I suspect Jesus helped Zacchaeus see himself as others saw him and then presented a different vision for the use of his resources, power and influence. Whatever Jesus said, it melted Zacchaeus' heart and changed his life, which impacted the lives of everyone around him.

Would you let Jesus speak to you this morning? Will you let him melt your heart and transform you? I hope so and am confident everyone around you does, too.