

In 2019... a high profile college Southern California admissions scandal involved some affluent parents... including celebrities like Lori Loughlin... and Felicity Huffman. ... The public was made aware that they were involved in bribery and fraud... to secure their children's admission to prestigious universities. ... The scandal was a striking example of entitlement among the wealthy – believing they could circumvent the system that everyone else must follow.

The passage that we come to today raises the whole question of **stewardship** versus **entitlement**. ... We are in a time right now where we **all** think we are entitled. ... We believe what we have - is **really** ours.

Television advertising certainly has not helped at all. We are living in an era where we say: '*You deserve a break today.*' ...and too many of us believe that. ... Those who are poor have come to believe they deserve welfare. ... Those who are rich have come to believe that they deserve tax breaks and special treatment over the rest of us (commoners.) ... Workers (without batting an eyelash) feel they deserve better fringe benefits. ... Big banks and corporations **would destroy the economy if they failed** – so they deserve bail-outs that are **unheard-of** for smaller companies. ... If we are a special interest... we deserve automatic government assistance.

Young college graduates believe they are entitled to high-paying jobs without them having any relevant experience or qualifications. ... And some of you have put up with my recent rants about the increasing numbers of college students that I teach every term – who really believe that they are entitled to a good grade without coming to class... turning-in assignments... or following the often-repeated instructions... on the

assignments that they do turn-in. ... Entitlement is a real problem... wouldn't you agree...? ... And I think that an ungodly pride seems to be behind much of it.

The Pharisees thought they were entitled. Pride was certainly fueling it. They had the strange idea that money was deserved. Money was a sign that they were blessed by God... and poverty was the result of God's curse. ... Well... today we will see Jesus reject that whole idea.

Last week (in the passage just before today's)... we saw that all of us are stewards of what we have... and we are to use it to bless others... to bring life... to bring health and hope and joy. ... We studied a very powerful parable that Jesus told about an unrighteous steward who diligently applied his creativity in using the money he had available to him – to secure a better future for himself.

Jesus used that man's diligence... and that man's pre-occupation with looking out for his future – to say that believers ought to be exercising the same attitude of future-looking diligence. We are too casual – we lack fervency. ... (Maybe we have our own sense of entitlement about our future – so we don't bother to invest what God has given to us... in order to make future ETERNAL friends in heaven (who come to the Lord... and welcome us... thanking us for investing in them.)

Jesus was so forthright in last week's lesson... and He will be just as forthright in today's! Make friends through your use of money. Use your money to gain friendship with God and people so that both Heaven and redeemed humanity will welcome you home in eternity. Be faithful with

money because if you do... God will entrust you with true spiritual riches. And remember... you cannot serve both God and money – period!

The verses (last week) and the verses today will suggest that if you have the resources to help... and choose not to - you are judged. (And) this message is not unique to Luke chapter 16. ... The Apostle John issues this warning in his first letter: “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” (3:17).

James, the practical-minded brother of our Lord makes the same point:

James 2:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,*

¹⁶ *and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?*

James questions the authenticity of the faith of one who does nothing to help another who has physical needs. ... John does not see how it is possible to love God and not help one in material need (1 John 4:7-8.) ... Last week’s Parable of the Dishonest Manager (vv. 1–15) addressed the proper *use* of money. Today we will read another powerful parable that Jesus told. This parable confronts the *abuse* of money. .. It is a solemn warning.

But even more... it warns us about the dramatic reversals that can come after death... and also the terrors of Hell. ... It exposes the subtle causes of the callous indifference that people within the worshiping community sometimes show to the poor. But before we read the next parable... Luke provides us with a conversation Jesus had with some pharisees. From this we will understand why Jesus told this second parable.

Luke 16:14

Even though the Lord had directed his message (the parable that we studied last week) – *primarily* to His disciples... others (too) had been listening. ... Among them were the Pharisees. They had heard whatever Jesus had said about a person's attitude toward (and use of) material possessions... and about the *impossibility* of being devoted to both God and goods. ... They did not appreciate this teaching (at all) because they were lovers of money. .. Their pride had been injured. Jesus had touched their sore spot.

He hit a nerve and pressed a “Hot Button” of the Pharisees. They were not set apart for God (in other words “consecrated to God”)... but covetous of money. They used their religious position to fill their own pockets. Christ's words about money were contrary to their evil practices. The Lord poked at their *pride balloon* and popped it.

The pharisees responded (verse 14 shows) by deriding Jesus. ... What does that actually mean? ... The word “**deride**” is from the Greek word ***ekmukterizo*** {*ek-mook-ter-id'-zo*}. (And) This word is full of interest. It is used only here and in Luke 23:35... where it is used to describe the scoffing directed at Christ as He hung on the cross. ... It means literally “*to turn up the nose.*” ... The Pharisees simply turned up their noses at Christ's teaching. ... The intensified form of the word here tells us that they were scoffing at Him openly. Luke gives us the reason—they loved money. They laughed mockingly and very persistently. The tense of this word means they *kept* doing it.

What a way to respond to such powerful teaching! They derided Jesus to discredit Him and to intimidate every listener into rejecting it (like *they* did.)

But Jesus didn't shrink from their challenge. He called the Pharisees detestable in the sight of God. ("Give it to them – Jesus! ... Go get them!")

Luke 16:15

Jesus unmasked these hypocrites. What he told them amounted to this:

"You are the people who pass yourselves off before men as if you were living in harmony with God's holy law. But your righteousness is only a façade. On the inside you are the very opposite of what you want people to believe you are. However, God has your number. He knows that your religion is sham. For, what men see of you and admire is an abomination in God's sight."

The religion of the Pharisees was an outward show. Their dedication to God was false (fake and phony!) The concern of this group was for the approval of men... not the approval of God. Their self-righteousness produced no changes in their hearts.

These men... were like many today. They were consumed with self-justification... justifying themselves before other men. The only problem with that is they will not stand before men one day to give an account of their soul - and neither will you and I. ... We will all stand before the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible declares the fallacy of self-justification. God is omniscient (which means that He knows all hearts.)

Psalm 139:1 (ESV)

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

We may fool our friends and family and fellow man... but we will never fool God because He knows our hearts (our deepest thinking... all of our secret

hopes and desires and true motivations.) How ludicrous to think that we could ever fool Him) ... He is omniscient. If that truth would grip mankind... it would radically change their behavior. ... [P A U S E] ...

The Pharisees valued (*greatly*) their tradition... rules and practices — some of which prohibited healing on the Sabbath day. But Christ put them in their place by saying *what they thought important* - was an abomination to God. The same is true today. Many things mankind thinks are so great and important... God turns up *His* nose at them.

God's values are not the same as human values. Down here... people admire those who are rich. The Lord Jesus (however) was reading the hearts of those who were scoffing at Him. He told them: "*The things that rule your hearts are objects of disgust to God.*" ...And then Jesus added this!

Luke 16:16

Now THIS is going to take some unpacking. ... (And) not every scholar agrees as to the meaning of what Jesus is saying (here). I read so many interpretations from men that I respect – and they all seemed to differ. But I am going to preach it the way that I believe has the best support from the context and the Greek grammar that was used by Luke.

First... I'll start with something that **DOES HAVE** a large consensus about the meaning. There is little to no dispute about the meaning of "*The Law and the Prophets were until John...*" ... The coming of John the Baptist signaled a total change. Until the ministry of John the Baptist... the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed. ... John the Baptist's ministry was the dividing line between the Old and New Testaments.

These Old Testament scriptures (the Law and the Prophets) were a guide to the people that prepared them for the coming of the Messiah. The prophecies that foretold of Christ were now being fulfilled and a new era had begun with John. The arrival of John the Baptist and Jesus signaled a total change in God's message to the world. The kingdom was at hand. (NOT "will be" at hand someday.) No. The kingdom was NOW at hand. The King Himself had come. That changed everything.

(And) now the good news of the kingdom of God (which the Law and the Prophets pointed to) is being preached – "*which you pharisees have decided to sneer at...*"

O.K. There is a certain amount of confidence that THIS MUCH... is what Jesus meant. (Now to the part of the verse where everyone does not agree.)

We turn now to the meaning of the Greek word βιάζω (the basic sense of which is "*to apply force*.") Now... stay with me for just a moment. ... We just read the ESV translation that has it: "*everyone forces his way into it*." (Everyone is doing the forcing.) But the grammar of this word is that it is written in the passive voice of Greek grammar. The verb has a softened force because it is in the passive voice. Furthermore the people aren't doing the forcing. The passive voice indicates that the forcing is being done on them. Everyone is experiencing some sort of soft forcing of the kingdom on them **through this preaching**.

So... specifically... I believe Jesus is saying: "Everyone is being urged (insistently) to come into the Kingdom. ... Sneer all you want – but I will incessantly (and firmly) urge everyone to accept what came with John and

is now here.) ... This view doesn't ignore the grammar... and it fits the context remarkably well. ... [P A U S E] ...

The religious leaders – rather than respecting what the Law and Prophets had communicated – placed a greater emphasis on their own interpretation of it... as they made it say whatever they wanted it to say. In this case... they did not want to give up their control of the people. They did not want to acknowledge the evidence from Scripture that their rule of the people of God was over... and the Messiah's Kingdom was here.

Jesus is about to point to another example of their manipulation of Scripture. Those who were sneering... were circumventing the Scriptures. (They were bending and twisting their message... in order to make it suit their own purposes).

“You have eluded... danced around... side-stepped... and dodged Scripture... so that you won't have to recognize that the Kingdom is here... and let me show you another matter where you manipulated it to make it say what you wanted...”

But first Jesus makes a statement about the God-like nature of the thing they were abusing. You cannot change Scripture around. Like God... it is eternal! It stands as it is. *“It is not something you have the authority to mess with!”* ... Here is how Jesus tells them that... and then we will see Jesus point out an example of their futile attempts of doing just that.

Luke 16:17

But you have tried to change it. ... Here is a specific example.

Luke 16:18

If this was the only verse of Scripture that said something about divorce... I would have to conclude that there is NEVER to be any divorce FOR ANY REASON. But it isn't the only verse. We learn (compositely) from verses in Matthew 5... Matthew 19... and 1 Corinthians 7... that there are exceptions. I am not going to get into specifics about those right now... other than to say... that I believe exceptions are when a partner commits adultery... or one partner is an unbeliever and leaves the marriage.

So why didn't Jesus mention these exceptions? Because He didn't need to – in order to communicate the point that He was making. Remember His main point is not teaching about divorce (here.) It is about how the religious leaders of Israel were abusing Scripture. Jesus only said what He needed to say for making that point.

Let me explain... I want to read directly from the most respected Rabbinical writings of Jesus' day – the Mishnah. I want to show you what Jesus is pointing to. It is their widely accepted teaching that TORTURED the Scriptures on the matter of divorce.

The *Mishnah* preserves the oral tradition of the rabbis... two of whom (Shammai and Hillel) lived shortly before the time of Jesus. Here is a short example of their deliberations on this topic:

The House of Shammai say, "A man should divorce his wife only because he has found grounds for it in unchastity, since it is said, *Because he has found in her indecency in anything* (Deut. 24:1)." And the House of Hillel say, "Even if she spoiled his dish, since it is said, *Because he has found in her indecency in anything*. R. Aqiba says, "Even if he found someone else prettier than she, since it is said, *And it shall be if she find no favor in his eyes* (Deut. 24:1)."

According to the Pharisees (who favored the teaching of Hillel)... marriage could be created on a whim and dissolved just as flippantly. Make no mistake: They knew full well what they were doing. Jesus didn't need a long... drawn-out discourse to prove His point. When He merely alluded to the marriage-divorce issue and their absurd dismantling of God's design... the Pharisees wisely shut their mouths — at least for the time being. He had just proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the Pharisees subordinated the Word of God to serve their own desires.

(PLEASE HEAR ME ON THIS!) ... As Citizens of God's kingdom... you and I must always side with integrity - even when it hurts! (Can I get an amen...?)

But the Lord was not through with the mockers. He pulled back the veil and showed us what awaits people on the other side of the grave. He had just given a glimpse of those conditions in verse 9... and His listeners had answered Him with derision. ... So next... Jesus tells (*what I believe is*) another parable.

But I need to reveal to you that not every Bible scholar in our evangelical camp thinks this is a parable. Many scholars (who I admire) say THIS is a description of something that actually happened. They believe Jesus relates a true event involving people whom the Lord knew and about things of great importance of which He alone could speak. The evidence they cite for their believing this way – is the main character is given a name. They claim a parable would not give a name... they are all elusive... “a certain man”... “a rich young ruler”... “a certain land owner”... But here we are told about a poor man with the name “Lazarus.”

For me... this evidence is inconclusive. So I am going to treat what we are about to read – as a parable. (And) parables must utilize certain interpretive principles. One of those principles is that we must never develop our theology – from the details of the story that are only there to point us to the main message.

I will warn you right now. There is a strong temptation to focus on several details in this story and to develop a belief about what happens to people when they die. For example - you might notice that the rich man who is being tormented in Hell... is aware of people beyond the great chasm... over in the other place (which is the place of paradise.) He sees the former peasant who was often laid at his doorstep... and THAT SOUL is in paradise... while HE is in torment. ... Some evangelicals notice this and base their belief from it that people in Hell will be able to see us.

But please don't try to develop any strongly-held beliefs from particular details. They are only presented in the story to point us toward the main message. The main point of the parable is the only part from which we should develop a strong belief.

How will we recognize what the main points are of the parable that we are about to read? How do we separate the (not-so-significant) details... from the message - of which we ARE to make a big deal...? ... Our best help will be remembering the context in which this parable was told. What was Jesus trying to get across to those who were sneering at Him? ... Let me tell you right now. Jesus is giving them a vivid warning about what will happen to them – if they continue to abuse God's Word... continue their abuse of their wealth... and continue their unbelief (which was the foundation for the 1st two... abusing God's Word and their wealth.)

Luke 16:19-23

I need to explain some of the details (here) as they relate to how Jesus' audience would have understood what He was saying. It will help direct our attention to the main message. I will speak about popular Jewish belief during Jesus' day... as well as a few things that actually comes from Scripture.

Sheol or hades (translated "hell" in some places of the New Testament) is divided into two compartments: paradise (which is called Abraham's Bosom in this parable) and the place of torment. ... Paradise was emptied when Christ took with Him at His ascension the Old Testament believers. No one is in that compartment of Hades anymore. (Eph. 4:8–10 discusses that.) ... The other side (the place of torment) will be emptied at the Great White Throne Judgment. (You can read about this in Revelation 20:11-15.) These will then be cast into the eternal lake of fire (which is also known as "the second death.")

Now when the rich man died, his spirit went to the place of torment, the compartment where the lost go. The beggar went to the compartment called paradise or Abraham's Bosom. ... This was all due to what was in the hearts of these two men.

Next... we shall see that the rich man is not condemned because he is rich... but because he slipped into the coma of callousness that wealth often produces. He became consumed with his own joy... leisure... and celebration... and failed to respond to the suffering and need of others around him. ... His callousness made his earthly riches all that he would receive from life.

Luke 16:24-30

How wrong he was! ... Someone from the dead did actually appear to the people. ... And his name was Lazarus (though not the Lazarus of the parable). ... The account of this is found in John 11. When Jesus raised (this other) Lazarus from the dead... did that result in everybody being converted? ... Not at all! The result was that Christ's enemies planned to kill the risen Lazarus (we see in John 12:10)... and the religious leaders were more determined than ever to destroy Jesus (is what John 11:47–50 tells us.)

Luke 16:31

The people who Jesus was talking to... (the sneering group of pharisees) ... did not hear Moses and the Prophets. (Moses and the Prophets... by the way... was the way they referred to the entire Old Testament in Jesus' day. It meant "the Scriptures".) They were not hearing it. They were adjusting it to suit their liking.

So looking at the context in which this parable was told... I believe Jesus had no fewer than three specific aims.

First, *God's written Word is the most important evidence a person can examine.* ... Don't delve into a lot of religions. Don't start asking for miracles. Don't expect supernatural phenomena to take place. Don't start waiting for visions and dreams.

Only a responsive heart will listen to God's message and respond to his great works. No amount of wonder-working can change a heart that is unwilling to be challenged by God's demand for righteousness. A lack of

signs is not why people reject Jesus. Rather... people **willfully** reject Him. The heart cannot see what it is not looking for. Jesus' message is a call to recognize the need to repent. Those with ripe hearts recognize that need and come to Him for the forgiveness He makes available to them. They also receive the righteousness and relationship He supplies.

Compassion for those in need is the result. Those whose hearts are hardened will never accept the call to recognize their need to let God change them. They will not respond to the evidence that God leaves in Jerusalem's empty tomb.

Second, God's written Word contains the most compelling information to prepare us for death.

Consider what Scripture says about death. If you are a believer... you will find your fears calmed. Assurance replaces panic. You will see confusion lifted. You will discover there is literally an eternal dwelling place for those who know the Lord Jesus Christ... and God's arms are open.

Third, the person who ignores the Word of God in life will not be ignored by the God of the Word in eternity. YOU ARE NOT ENTITLED.

Just as there is a heaven to gain... there is a hell to reject. You may not believe it today. Someday you **will** I hope that happens... **before** it's too late.