



“Mess to Masterpiece”
Luke 16: 14 - 18
September 29, 2019

We are going to be in Luke Chapter 16 this morning. I would like to begin by showing you a series of photographs that display for us how good we human beings are at making messes, starting at a very young age.

In this photo, it looks like the kids wanted to have some chocolate milk, and the can of Nestle Quick Powder is all over the kitchen floor. Parents, you might not want to leave that kind of thing in the bottom cupboard!

This little guy wanted to have some cereal for breakfast, and he is raising his arms in triumph because he managed to open that box and get the cereal everywhere. And what did this guy want for breakfast? Scrambled eggs! Yum, wow!

I'm not sure what this little gal was going for. Maybe it was a little canister of marshmallow cream or Cool-Whip. I sure hope it is not a bag of plaster, though it kind of looks like it. However, this little guy found a much better use for plaster. He enhanced the flat-screen in the living room!

We human beings, we are capable of making messes, not only early in life but later in life as well. If we are being honest about things, I think we would all have to admit that we can make messes of even the good gifts of the Lord. That is how we are. We are fallen. Sometimes the good things of the Lord are abused in this world that we live in by people such as us.

But as we see the fact that we human beings can make messes of things, praise God for His redeeming grace. Praise God for His ability to make all things new. Praise God that in the midst of our sin, there is the Gospel of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, as He is the One who forgives sins and transforms even the most difficult of circumstances.

This morning we continue in Luke Chapter 16, and as we pick up the story of the life of Christ, we are encountered once again with a group of men called Pharisees. They were very religious people. They took the Old Testament of the Bible very seriously. They were men who would have gone to synagogue every single Saturday.

Not only would they have contemplated the portion of Scripture for exposition ahead of synagogue, but they probably would have had it memorized. They had a very successful nationwide operation, you might say. They had synagogue that they presided over all throughout the land of Israel.

They had accrued much wealth and much influence. And they obeyed all kinds of religious rituals and customs, not only the Laws of the Old Testament, but also their interpretations and applications of the Law. What we see in this is that their hearts were still so very far from God. They were, in fact, distorting the things of the Lord. They were making a mess of good things in several areas.

As we dig into this portion of Scripture, I wonder if we will detect three of those areas. Let's read through Luke Chapter 16 and Verses 14 through 18, as Jesus addressed these things. Actually, let's begin with Verse 13:

¹³"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."

¹⁴The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. ¹⁵And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

¹⁶"The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. ¹⁷But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

¹⁸"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Once again in this portion of Scripture, we have the Messiah, King Jesus, taking the direct approach and with much boldness, he spoke to men of power in the First Century.

I wonder if in reading that text, you were able to catch with me three areas that Jesus addressed in particular, three areas that were being abused by these men. First, we see how Jesus addressed their use of money. These were men who were known for their longing for wealth, even to the point that Jesus could say to them that they were willing to devour the households of widows in order to benefit themselves by what they gained.

So first we see how Jesus addressed the Pharisees love of money. Second, we see how Jesus addressed their use of the Law of God revealed through Moses in the first five books of the Old Testament. They felt like they could justify themselves in God's sight through obedience to these laws, and they regulated the lives of others through these laws and their traditions, their application of the Law.

Third, we see that Jesus addressed their view of marriage and even more specifically, their perspective on divorce. It is interesting to see that in how strict they were with all their religion and law-keeping; they had become so very loose in relation to marriage and divorce and remarriage.

So, Jesus hit them head-on in this interaction that we just read. I want us to take a look at these three areas. And I want for us to do so recognizing even within ourselves one of the strongest impulses of the human condition—that strong impulse within us is to justify ourselves.

Jesus even used that language in addressing the Pharisees. You seek to justify yourselves before men. That tendency to want to make it seem like we are still doing right, even when we are doing wrong. That is the practice of self-justification.

As far as evangelical's go, I think something that might be observed is this: When we are speaking on general terms, we are very willing to say yes that we are sinners. Yes, we are fallen. We are all messed up, and we do messed up things. Yes, when it comes to generalities, we say we are a sinner in need of grace.

However, whenever somebody speaks with specificity into an area where we are going against the grain of God's will for our lives, where we are sinning in a particular area, do you want to know who rises up within pretty much each one of us, including me? It is that inner self-justifying Pharisee that says, *I know I'm a sinner but in this situation, if you knew all the circumstances, I'm really not really doing anything that is displeasing to the Lord.*

This comes up so often. We see these men doing this and Jesus saw through their defense mechanisms. He said, *You seek to justify yourselves before men, but God sees into your hearts.* As we look into what is written for us in the pages of Scripture this morning, I pray that we will receive the gaze the Messiah within us, the eyes of the One who was pure and holy and loving and good.

And with the psalmist of Psalm 139, we will say:

**²³Searach me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts
²⁴And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.**

I pray that we can receive the teaching of this portion of Scripture with humble hearts, discerning the Spirit to lead us humbly before the Lord for forgiveness of sin through Jesus and for repentance that we might walk in accordance with the will of the Lord in three areas of life that can become messy.

So let's see three messy areas for a great many Pharisees. I'm not only talking about what Jesus was addressing with those men back in the First Century, but I am talking about the Pharisees within us too.

Three messy areas for a great many Pharisees:

First, we see:

1. Making a Mess of Money (16:14-15)
The Love of Money

This is a continuation of what we studied last week. It continues on into the text that is before us this morning. As we see how Jesus addressed the love of money that the Pharisees had in their hearts, let me remind you that what we see here in this text is an escalation in how the Pharisees responded to Jesus.

The beginning of this section is back in Chapter 15 and Verses 1 and 2. We read there that the Pharisees were muttering or grumbling, kind of complaining in that way against Jesus, because He spent time eating and speaking to and relating closely to tax collectors and notorious sinners.

The Pharisees were asking why Jesus was spending time with them. They were complaining about it. As we studied these past weeks, Jesus gave three parables to teach about God's heart for the lost, that they be reached and come into a right relationship with the Lord by grace through faith and repentance.

Then Jesus continued into Chapter 16 talking about how in addition to this, the people of God should be investing their resources along those lines. Jesus made that very, very interesting statement that we took some time to consider last week: *Make friends for yourselves using unrighteous wealth so that they will be receive into eternal habitation.*

Use your money and your resources to forge Gospel friendships. So, Jesus turned it around and told the Pharisees, *Yes, not only should you have more of an interest in the lost, you should spend some of your money to reach people.* At this point, things escalated.

Jesus went on and told the Pharisees, *You are stewards of what God has given you. You can serve only one master. God or money. You can't serve money and God.* At this point, they escalated from muttering to ridiculing Him, as it says in this portion of Scripture.

It became much more open. Once Jesus started talking to the Pharisees about their love of money and seeking to justify themselves, they became like internet trolls—ridiculing, trying to dismiss Him by laughing at the things that He was saying in the same way that there are a great many people in this world who will scoff and laugh at the teachings of Scripture. This was happening then, and it happens into our day.

The Pharisees went from muttering to scoffing. Then we see how Jesus addressed this. Verse 14:

¹⁴The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.

As in my picture illustration last week, these were men who loved money. They were doing the slow dance with money and all that it could provide. *Oh, money. Oh, all the comforts that you bring.* They loved money.

Jesus addressed this. Then He said in Verse 15:

¹⁵And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Jesus could hardly use stronger language for the context that He was in than to use this language of abomination. The heart of this word is something that is detestable, kind of like how I respond to a hive of spiders. My fingertips literally curl with one spider, let alone a lot of them! Detestable! An abomination!

And while you will find some range of use with this word *abomination* in the Bible, most often you will find it used in the context of idolatry, when the people of God would be worshiping false gods, worshiping created things, rather than the Living Creator God who gives good things.

So, Jesus was talking about how you can't serve two masters. It is either God or money. What is it going to be? These men were serving their master money. These men did not love people and use money to bless people. Rather, they loved money and they used people to get more things.

They were not worshiping God with their money. They were worshiping money as God, so Jesus called them out on this. Brothers and sisters, before the Lord we must guard our hearts because it is possible for us to love money and deify money, to give it first place in our hearts as well. People of God, we need to be going before the Lord saying, *Let Your truth wash over me. Let Your Spirit sanctify me.*

It is only by the blood of Jesus Christ that we can be cleansed of the sin of such idolatry. We need to have faith in Jesus, confessing such sin to Him. And we need to say, *Lord, by Your Spirit, keep working in my heart so that I don't worship created things.* This is something that we all need to be thinking about humbly before the Lord.

I was reading through the Life Application Study Bible, one of the several that I read. They listed a series of questions that I thought were so penetrating as we guard ourselves against the love of things. Just take these in as I read them, and consider them before the Lord, asking the Spirit of Jesus to lead you in the right way.

Money has the power to take God's place in your life. That is why Jesus said no one can serve God and money. It is one or the other. Here are some questions. Consider them before the Lord.

- **Do you think and worry about money with great frequency?**

It is something that is on your mind all the time. How can I get more? How can I get more? How can I get more?

- **Do you give up what you should be doing in order to make more of it?**

Are you setting relationships off to the periphery? Are you on a consistent basis moving relationship with God, fellowship, your spouse and children because you want more and more money?

- **Do you spend a great deal of your time caring for your possessions?**

Good stewardship is a good thing, but it is one thing to wash your car, however it is another thing to baby that car. Oh, it is my baby! Or whatever your possession might be. Don't touch the baby. You get ticked off at people because they touch the baby! Do these possessions rise up and get elevated in your heart?

- **Is it hard to give money away?**

To give to generous purposes. To give to the purpose of God. To give to people in need? To give to mission endeavors. Is it not with joy, or is it a death struggle to give? The Lord loves a cheerful giver, and we need to pray, *Lord, help me to see the benefit of what can be done through the resources you put in my hand. Change my heart.*

Finally:

- **Are you in debt?**

If I can add a little Jeff Saltzmann twist into it, this is probably talking about consumer debt, where we want things so badly that we bust out the plastic card and get things that we can't afford, because we feel like we can't live without the things we want. We buy a bunch of things that we don't have money to buy because we want those things so badly.

Those are some searching questions. I stand up here before you as one who was brought under the scrutiny of those searching questions, saying, *Lord, by the work of Your grace in my life, help me to keep my eyes focused on you and help not any idolatry to rise up in my heart, especially since I live in an age where it is so expensive to live.*

This can happen by the work of the Spirit within us. We need to be praying about these things. We continue and we see that there is another messy area for a great many Pharisees. We see also that they were:

2. Making a Mess of the Law (16:16-17)

The Use of God's Law

The Pharisees made a mess in how they used the Law of God. This is the next issue that Jesus addressed.

Jesus was speaking of all of the commands that were given in the Old Testament here in this context. You have the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament that were written by Moses. They contain six-hundred and thirteen commands from the Lord. And they were epitomized by the top ten, The Ten Commandments.

The Pharisees were those who were trying to attain their standing before the Lord through the practice of these laws. And they were regulating the lives of others through such laws through their legalisms, their traditions of the elders, and all their statements of application of the Law.

It's funny because the Pharisees big beef with Jesus was that they thought that He was dismissive of the Old Testament Law. They thought that because He did not wash His hands the way that they thought that He was supposed to wash His hands according to their traditions, they thought that because Jesus was healing people on the Sabbath, they thought that because He allowed His disciples to have kernels of wheat to rub out to have a snack on the Sabbath and violating the Sabbath, they thought that Jesus was dismissive of the Old Testament Law.

The amazing thing about it is that Jesus was not violating any of the Old Testament Laws of God. Instead, He was not falling into line with their traditions. That really, really upset the Pharisees. So, here in this context, while they were having an honest discussion together, Jesus said, *Well, let me address the Law then. Let me give you my view on it.*

As we move into Verses 16 through 17, we see what Jesus said:

¹⁶“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. ¹⁷But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

In these two verses, I read something of a paradox. There is something of attention, because in Verse 16, Jesus stated that the Law and the Prophets, they give way to the Gospel of the Kingdom.

However, in the next verse in Verse 17, Jesus said that the Law and the Prophets have continuity. They continue not only into our day but into eternity. You can turn heaven and earth, before you render the Moral Law of God void.

What we read when we continue into the New Testament understanding of the Law and how we have teaching given to us by the Spirit, is that the Law of God was always there, and it remains a vital ministry to drive us to the grace of God.

It is there to reveal our need for forgiveness because we are all law-breakers, every single last one of us. As it says Romans 3:20

²⁰For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

This use of the Law not in bringing salvation, but revealing our need for salvation is something to this day that I think is commonly overlooked and missed in a lot of the preaching and a lot of Gospel presentations.

There are a great many pastors and preachers, and I understand the heart of this, but they just want to emphasize to people the love of God. You will hear this kind of preaching—God loves you so much. God loves you with a love that is immeasurable. The love of the Lord cannot be fathomed, it is so high, and it is so deep. And God loves you so much that He died for you. Christ went to the cross because of His love for you.

This is what is preached. But that is an interesting way of expressing love when you think about it. What if there was a young man who fell heads-over-heels for a young woman, and he tells her, *I love you so much, and I am going to show you my love in that I am going to the electric chair for you. My mind is made up. I am going to take an injection for you. That's it. I love you so much and that is how I am going to demonstrate it.*

You would question that! I appreciate the notion, but what are we talking about here. If this young man fell in love with a woman who herself was facing the death penalty for something, and he said he wanted to find a way to take her place, then suddenly it might start making a little more sense.

Likewise, what we read in the pages of Scripture, Old and New Testaments, is that God is Judge. He is a judge. We like to think of Him as Father, and He is that. We think of Him as Creator, and He is that.

But clearly He has a high courtroom in Heaven, and He is holy, holy, holy. He is pristine in His righteousness and He experiences righteous indignation over all sin. Every single one of us, we sin against God's Law every day, infraction upon infraction upon infraction.

With this understanding of our guilt in the sight of God, with this understanding of the fact that we deserve death for sin against the holiness of God, suddenly the death of Jesus in our stead makes sense. He is the One who came into the world to take our sin into Himself.

And on the cross, He was punished for our sin as though He were the one who was doing the sinning all along, though He wasn't. We were. We were the ones who broke God's Law. Jesus is the One who paid this price.

The Law has an ongoing significance in that it does not justify us before God, we can't live it out, but it does reveal to us how we fall short day in and day out and day in and day out. Jesus is the One who paid the price for that sin. I think Jesus spoke this language with these things in view. So we understand that it is the Law with its continued significance in pointing out our sin.

There is more. The Law sends us to Christ for grace. We come to Christ and the Law has an ongoing ministry, not to find a way for us to be justified in God's sight, but it reveals God's Moral Will for our lives as those who are cleansed and forgiven in Christ. We then have like the man of Psalm 1, there is delight that grows within us to live in the way that God desires us to live.

Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees about their use of God's Law, seeking to clarify where He stood on that matter as well. We continue, and we see that there is one more area that Jesus addressed. Jesus addressed their practice of divorce.

3. **Making a Mess of Marriage (16:18)**

The Practice of Divorce

Continuing with the Lord's reproof of the Pharisees, Jesus began to address an area where many of those men were falling woefully short. It is so amazing because they were presenting themselves as those who were so zealous for the Law of God, and Jesus said to them, *You want to talk about your zeal for the Law of God and you think that I am the one who is dismissive of the Law of God. Well, let's talk about the Lord's will for marriage.*

With this, I think that perhaps some of the Pharisees would have winced and desired to run to the hills. Jesus did not address this issue with them haphazardly. It was not a random thing. What we understand as we read the context of the New Testament time is that the Pharisees had created a form of marriage that let the man out at his initiative for pretty much any reason that he conjured up.

It was written in the book of Rabbi Hillel: *[He may divorce her] even if she spoiled a dish for him.* It is written the book of Rabbi Akiba that a man is permitted to divorce if he found someone prettier than his wife. He could divorce her and be joined to the woman more attractive in his eyes.

These things were written in the books of these prominent Hebrew rabbis. I shared these things with Kristy, and she said, *Man, what was going on in their lives that they were writing and allowing these things?* With that, the Pharisees of the ancient world were so permissive with divorce and remarriage that it was just ludicrous.

So Jesus stepped forward and He spoke to them God's for will for marriage and divorce. He said, *No! No! Let's talk about the will of the Lord as far as these things go.* Jesus gave an application of His own relation to the Seventh Commandment, the one concerning adultery.

In Verse 18, Jesus said:

¹⁸“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Jesus was saying, *Okay, you found someone that you like better. You are going to dismiss your wife and get married to the one that you like better. Fine, go ahead. Let's just call it what it is. It is adultery.*

If you read this carefully, Jesus also elevated the woman's part in this too. If there was woman who was divorced from her husband and sought to get married to another man, it would be adultery. Herod and Herodias comes to mind.

Herod who was married. Herodias was married. They fell for each other. They both dismissed their previous spouses, and they got married to each other. Jesus looked at that kind of thing and He was saying that you can sanctify it with some kind of religious service, but you need to call it what it is. It is adultery.

A lot of us might be thinking that this is kind of restrictive. Aren't there any exceptions in the pages of Scripture? Yes, the fact is we can move over to what it says in Matthew Chapter 19 where Jesus gave an exception. There is a certain freedom for a person whose spouse has committed adultery against them, leading to divorce. We can read in I Corinthians 7:15 how when a believing spouse is abandoned by an unbelieving spouse, there is freedom for divorce.

There is a lot to be explored as far as those things go, but here in this context. We just need to let the strong teaching of Jesus settle into our hearts and shape our view of marriage and divorce in a society just like the First Century Pharisaic Israel had become so very permissive about what constitutes a marriage and the grounds by which that marriage can be dissolved.

All of the teachings of Jesus flowed forth from a heart of goodness and love. This teaching is here to affirm God's all-time plan and design for marriage. You find God's design for marriage stated first in the second chapter of Scripture. Genesis Chapter 2 and Verse 24 is God's all-time plan for marriage.

It is written at the very beginning of Scripture before the human race ever fell into sin. The same statement is quoted by Jesus twice in the Gospels, as recorded in Mark Chapter 10, then again in Matthew Chapter 19. This same statement is quoted by the Apostle Paul in the glorious Ephesians Chapter 5 and Verses 22-33, where this quote anchors down the exposition of what marriage is in God's sight.

That all-time statement of marriage might be familiar to many of you. Again, it is stated for the first time in Genesis 2:24:

²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

That is marriage! It is stated multiple times in the pages of Scripture by the Lord and by Jesus Christ our Messiah. That text lays out for us the participants of marriage, the priority of marriage, the permanence of marriage, and the unity of marriage.

What is marriage in the sight of the Living God who created it? One man and one woman without exceptions, brothers and sisters. Those are the participants of marriage. Not a man and a man. Not a man and multiple wives. Not a woman and a couple of husbands. Not a woman and another woman. *A man shall leave his father and his mother, and he shall be joined to his wife.* Singular! That is what comprises marriage.

Then we see the priority of marriage. A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife. So, marriage is raised above even the paternal and maternal relationship. It is the

most significant relationship on the planet earth—husband and wife; the covenant that is produced in marriage.

We see the permanence of marriage—he shall hold fast to his wife. He shall be united to his wife. In Hebrew the word for *united* is *tamak*. I read in one of my commentaries that that word was sometimes used in terms of forging metals together by welding.

So it is intended to be a permanent union before God. A union of unity. The two become one flesh. That not only gives an understanding of how the man and the woman physically complement one another in marriage, but it also speaks about how they live life together.

What we see as we look at what is written in the pages of the Gospels, and what continues on in Ephesians Chapter 5, is that the purpose of God for all time for marriage is that it is to be a visible picture of the Gospel, of the relationship between Christ and His church.

So you will have the husband who cherishes his wife and sacrifices himself for her good; who serves her; who blesses her; who loves her with a love given by the Lord. You have a woman who is responsive to her husband; who respects him and who is going to be supportive and submissive to his God-given leadership in the relationship.

We enter into marriage knowing that it is an expression of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We don't go into marriage with a romantic perspective, seeking to make all our Hallmark Channel visions come true. Marriage is so much higher than any of that, though it can involve some of that.

But if you are depending on that to determine the continuance and the health of your marriage, understand, there are times where the feelings of such romance will come and go. I pray that they come often, but we go into marriage purposefully, desiring that our marriage reflect God and His church. This is what Jesus is affirming when He teaches this to us.

May the Lord speak into our hearts with inner resolve that we will submit ourselves to His teaching on what marriage is. And that we will put His grace on display through the relationships that we are in.

Finally, as we finish, let's circle back and see something that is so beautiful to see, and that is the heart and soul of the text that is before us, which is not given to us to condemn, but to convict and to bring us to grace.

Did you see the redeeming news that was is here for us in Verse 16? Verse 16 says:

¹⁶“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

That statement kind of puts John the Baptist before us as kind of a watershed moment; sort of a boundary line. God's plan is laid out in two great periods. We have the Old Testament and the New Testament, with the old covenant and the new covenant.

The Old Testament time was a time of expectation, preparation, anticipation, faith in what God would do when His Suffering Servant came. The New Testament is all about fulfillment, a culmination, and faith in what God has done in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

Now we are in this age of perfect cleansing through faith in Christ. We are living in the age of renewing grace. We are living in the age where those who come to Him are forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit, receive help through all the difficult things that they face in this life. We receive help in the midst of the messes that we make. We all make lots of messes, so we need God's help, not only to receive forgiveness of sin, but also newness of life.

I was printing up my sermon notes Thursday afternoon as I typically do. I sent them to the xerox machine. As I was going to get my notes, I saw this week's bulletin on the ledge outside my office where my mail is placed.

There are fourteen different pictures on the front of the bulletin that the children of our church have drawn. I am sure you have noticed them on your bulletins! However, the one that was placed on my shelf was from Johnathan, age 8. And I simply love it! It is a drawing of a muscle man and on the front it says, *God is powerful*. Yes, God is powerful!

We are good at making messes. The Lord is good at cleaning them up as we look to Him in faith and walk with Him in obedience and in the power He gives us to apply. He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.

So may the Lord take these areas and give us fresh waves of grace that we might not be those who seek to justify ourselves but just humble ourselves before the Lord, saying, *I am a sinner in need of grace. I thank you for what Jesus did at the cross and I thank you for the power of His resurrection. I want to walk in His grace.*

Let's close in a word of prayer.