

INTRO: Two weeks ago pastor Wade began this sermon series called “Put it in Perspective.” So one of the things we need to look at is our perspective toward our lives and toward God. The Bible tells us that human beings have been made in the IOG. What do we do with that? We tend to think that we *are* God—or at least “little gods.” We are physical creatures living in a physical world, and that’s all we’ve ever experienced. Consequently, our world revolves around ourselves. Our thoughts, plans, and priorities revolve around ourselves, our own happiness and security. How we live our lives revolves around our hopes, joys, fears, and the circumstances of our lives.

This is the basic humanistic approach to life that most of us—Christian or nonChristian; consciously or unconsciously—have. Consciously or unconsciously we focus on the 70 or 80 more or less years of our earthly life because that is all we know and experience. We tend to think—if we think about it at all—that when our life ends we just rot or cease to exist or who-knows-what-I’ll-cross-that-bridge-when-I-come-to-it.

If we think about it, however, this perspective is *amazingly* short-sighted. We Christians pay lip service to the fact that there is eternal life after we die here, but that really tends to make no difference in how we live our lives here and now. It should.

Why? Because eternal life is not just a hope, or a wish, or an opinion. It is a fact. How do we know that? Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Jesus’ rising from the dead is, in my opinion, the most important and significant fact of history. Why? Because it demonstrates that Jesus is unique. He is not just a “good man” or “prophet” or “teacher,” but is who he claimed to be: God Himself come to earth as a human being. The resurrection validates not only who Jesus is but also validates everything Jesus said.

I’m not going to talk about the historical evidence for the resurrection. Others have done that, such as Josh McDowell in his book *The Resurrection Factor*. The resurrection of Jesus proves that there is a God and shows who He is. That means that we are *fools* to live our lives as if He didn’t exist.

So what *should* our proper orientation to life and God be? That’s what we are going to talk about.

O/S: What I want to do is two things: (1) Look at a somewhat strange parable of Jesus; and then (2) See what it implies for our orientation to life and relationship with God.

READ: LUKE 16:1-13

I. The Parable of the Unjust Steward

This is a very strange parable isn’t it? Is Jesus teaching us to lie, and cheat, and steal? **[NO]** So what is this parable telling us?

A. All of us will be called on by God to give an account of our lives and what we have done. This is called the judgment. It will be final, and it will determine *where* we will spend our eternity—either on the new earth or in the lake of fire—and also *how* we will spend our eternity. This goes against our grain, especially as Americans. We all think we are so independent—but we’re not. We didn’t create ourselves—God did. And everything we have has been given to us, by God. We may say, “I have worked for everything I have; I wasn’t given it; I started with nothing and by my own effort have succeeded.” That’s not true. You didn’t create your genetic code, your family, your natural abilities, your particular circumstances. In fact, **Deut 8** says it is God who gives us the ability to make wealth.

So, although we say “this is my house, my spouse, my kids, my job, my car, my money, my stuff, my life” in a greater sense, none of it ultimately is—it all belongs to God. We are simply the *managers* or *stewards* of these things. And like the manager in the parable, we will have to give an account to God of what we did with it—because there is a day of reckoning.

The first and clear implication of this is that we had better get in right relationship with the master, with God. The only way we can do that is through faith in Jesus Christ, IOW, having Jesus as the center of our life, rather than ourselves. Having Jesus as the most important person in our life. Having Jesus as the one around whom our life and all of our decisions revolve. If we don’t do that then, by definition, we are *not* in proper orientation with life and God. The Bible tells us that it is Jesus who is going to judge us at the judgment. If we don’t know him, how can we expect to stand in the judgment? This is fundamental. If you have not yet taken that step then do it. If you have questions about this, then please talk with pastor Wade, or me, or any reasonably mature Christian here.

I’m not going to spend any more time talking about entering into a saving relationship with Jesus, despite how fundamental that is, because I think that most people in this room have already taken that step. Instead, I want to go back to the parable to see how it is designed to reorient our lives.

B. In the parable the unrighteous steward only had a little time to wind up affairs before he was going to be fired. But so do we only have a little time before we die and the books are opened and we have to give an account at the judgment. We don't know when that day will occur. We try not to think about it, and we hope that it won't be for a long, long time—but it's there and it's coming. [**The boy killed by the bus in TZ**]

This leads to the major point of the parable. You see, there is only one thing that makes sense of this otherwise rather odd parable, and it is this:

C. Securing one's future. What's going on here? [**Describe**] What the steward was doing was *securing his future*—because he could then go to each of the debtors for help [**DESCRIBE**].

The key to the parable is in **vv. 8-9**. What Jesus is saying is that ungodly people—like the unrighteous steward—do whatever they have to do to secure their futures. But the big difference is this: to the unrighteous steward in the parable, he thought that his future lasted from the moment he got fired until he died. Because after that it wouldn't matter because he'd be dead. That's the way most people think and act.

The difference for Christians is that our future doesn't *end* when we die, but in a real sense our future *begins* when we die—and it lasts *forever*. What Jesus is saying is that Christians need to be just as smart and purposeful and proactive as ungodly people and secure our futures *now*. In **v. 9** when he says [**READ**] what he means is: the “wealth of unrighteousness” is our money and things here in this life. What he is saying is: “use your money and possessions *now* to “make friends for yourselves.” How do we do that? By using our money and possessions to help the poor and needy and build the kingdom, by supporting missions, the work of the church, Bible translation, the spread of the Gospel, and all the other things that will make an everlasting difference. Because one day it will fail you—IOW, you will die. But if you've used your money and things now with your eternal future in mind, all the people whom you helped and helped bring to the Lord will act as a heavenly welcoming committee to welcome you into your eternity.

PROP: What this parable is telling us is: “Use what we have now to secure our *eternal future*.”

II. So how do we apply this in our lives?

A. This parable is telling us that to be properly oriented to life and to God we need to have an *eternal perspective* always at the forefront of our mind. It's almost paradoxical: the Bible compares our life here on earth to a shadow, a vapor, a breath, a flower that is here today and gone tomorrow. Think about it, even if we live to 100, this life is statistically .000000 compared to our eternal life. And yet, despite its brevity and unpredictability, this life is incredibly important—indeed, more important than we realize—because what we do here not only determines *where* we will spend our eternity but *how* we will spend our eternity.

You see, God has an eternal perspective toward us and our lives. God's plan from the beginning has been to live with his holy people in a holy place, to be with us and see us face-to-face. That began in the garden of Eden when God walked with Adam. Human sin disrupted things. But God's plan will be consummated when we are all together on the new earth. Consequently, Jesus said [**READ MATT 10:28**]. Jesus is comparing the relative value of this life versus eternal life and is pointing out the *infinitely* greater value of one's eternal life. He has an eternal perspective on life. That's why the things God does in our lives are *primarily* directed toward our *eternal* wellbeing, not our temporal pleasure, although there is that too.

That's also why Jesus said in **Matt 6:19-21** [**READ**]. In commenting on this, Dallas Willard states: “**Treasures are the things we try to keep because of the value we place on them. . . . To love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength means to *treasure* him, to hold him dear, and to protect and aid him in his purposes. Our only wisdom, safety, and fulfillment lies in so treasuring God. The first thing that Jesus tells us with respect to treasures is that to treasure things that are ‘upon the earth’ is not a smart strategy for treasuring. Treasures of the earth, by their very nature, simply cannot be held intact. . . . This means that we will invest in our relationship to Jesus himself, and through him to God. But beyond that, and in close union with it, we will devote ourselves to the good of other people. These are among God's treasures. (Deut. 32:9 tells us) ‘The Lord's portion is his people’ and (Gal. 6:8-10 says) ‘Therefore, as we have opportunities let us do good to all men, and most of all to the family of faith’. This is, precisely, *how* we deposit treasures in heaven on a daily, hourly basis.**”

So we need to ask ourselves, “How are we investing ourselves in other people—our spouse, children, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and people in need?” Other *people* should be the priority of our lives because every person is made in the IOG. How we treat God's image shows what we really think of Him. Ask yourself: “What are the needs of people and how am I trying to meet those needs?”

Why is this so important? It is important because this is the *basis* for the judgment—the accounting we will all have to give! Remember the sheep and the goats described by Jesus in **Matt 25** [**EXPLAIN**].

B. Jesus parable in Luke 16 concentrates largely on money and possessions, so let's consider that in light of the judgment. We all try to secure our future financially—and there's nothing wrong with that UNLESS, like the unrighteous steward in the parable, the *only* future we are trying to secure is our future in this life and this world. If that's all we're doing then we're just like the man in **Luke 12** who built the bigger barns to hold all the stuff he had accumulated. Jesus said [READ LUKE 12:20-21]. Again, Jesus is talking about “**storing up treasure**”—IOW securing our future—but *which* future? Jesus is confronting us to have an *eternal perspective* on life. Which is more important: this life that lasts 70 or 80 or 90 years or the next life that lasts *forever*? So which life are we primarily investing in to secure?

Jesus also talked about being “**rich toward God.**” How are we “rich toward God”? We are rich toward God as we use our money and possessions now to help the poor and needy and build the kingdom. Jesus said if all you have is a cup of cold water and you give it in his name, he sees that, he will remember that at the judgment and will reward you, and the reward will last *forever*.

Similarly, Paul says in **1 Tim 6:18-19** that if you have more than you need [READ]. Notice that Paul is using the *same language* Jesus used in **Matt 6** and **Luke 12**—about “**storing up treasure.**” Paul is telling us *how* we store up our treasure in heaven—by giving to help the poor and needy and to build the kingdom. Some people say, “you can't take it with you.” That's true. BUT, you can send it on ahead. By giving now we are not losing our money but are investing it in a great heavenly account that will pay us back interest for the next 10,000 million, billion, trillion, zillion years. You see, it's all a matter of perspective. **Use what you have now to secure your eternal future.**

C. But suppose we don't do that. Suppose we just live for this world and store up and spend all of our money on ourselves and our loved ones. Many people look at the rich and think “they have God's favor.” But the Bible gives us a different picture. [READ JAS 5:1-3, 5]

Notice the language James uses. He talks about “**moth-eaten**” and “**rust**” and “**storing us treasure.**” It's the same language Jesus used in **Matt 6** and **Luke 12**. What makes our money “rust” in the eyes of God? It is when we *don't* use it to help the poor and needy and build the kingdom, but only lavish it on ourselves. Then, our riches are *not* a sign of God's favor, but of his *judgment*. If all we do is store up our treasure on this earth, then our hearts are very far from Jesus. In that case, James says our very riches will testify *against* us at the judgment. And when he says in **v. 5** “**You've fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter,**” James is comparing these selfish people to pigs who are being fattened up for the slaughter. Don't let that be you. What we do with our money reveals what's most important to us—what's really in our heart. It's all a matter of perspective and all about *which future*—our temporal one or our eternal one—we are really most interested in securing.

We all have an obligation to support ourselves and our families. But we need to seriously evaluate our priorities: How much are we investing in our temporary lives and how much are we investing in our eternal lives? How much are we giving to support missions, the work of the church, the spread of the gospel? How much are we giving to help needy individuals and giving to those ministries and organizations that help the poor and the needy and build the kingdom?

CONCL: Our lives are far more important than we realize. It's all a matter of perspective. [DOT-STRING] Ask yourself: “Am I living for the dot, or am I living for the string?” If you're living for the dot you're a fool. But if we have the right perspective—the right orientation toward God, and people, and life, we will live for the string. Then we will **use what we have now to secure our eternal future.** And paradoxically, by doing that our lives here in the dot will be richer, and fuller, and better, and we will make the world a better place—precisely because our hearts are *not* focused on ourselves, but are focused on our real home—our *eternal* life with Jesus on the new earth.