

Date:October 11, 1998

Sermon:A Major Spiritual Test

Passage:Luke 16:9-16

Throughout this year we have been emphasizing personal growth, helping us to develop as believers. There was a quaint little sentence that I read one day about a man as he was trying to describe how he was growing in the Lord. He said "I aint what I use to be, but I'm not where I ought to be." And surely in all of our life we would pray that we are not where we use to be, but we all recognize that we are not where we ought to be. But I hope that in your life that there is a growth going on and the you have a plan and a purpose in your life to try to develop to become all that God wants you to be.

One of the ways in which we really need to understand about our growth in Christ, is to understand how we relate to material things. And in the book of Luke chapter 16 there is what is called the strangest parable Jesus ever gave but it has in it some real power-house truths to help us understand how we are to relate to all the material things around us. So let me read it and say a few words about it and we will notice it in just a moment.

Jesus told his disciples there was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions, in Bible times there were many people who lived outside of Israel. They would have managers to take care of their affairs and this land owner found out that his manager was obviously being dishonest. So he called him in and asked him "What is this I hear about you, give an account of your management because you are not going to be a manager for me anymore." Manager began to say to himself "Now what am I going to do, my master is taking away my job, I am not strong enough to work, to dig." A man read this parable one day and said "Well that sounds like so many I try to deal with, to try to get people to do some work. Whenever they talk about manual labor they thought it was Manual Labor - the Hispanic who lives in the apartment next door to me. They don't know anything about manual labor anymore." This man said "I don't know anything about labor, and I'm to proud to beg (not too proud to steal but he is too proud to beg)." And he said "This is what I do, when I lose my job, I'm going to work out something that people will take care of me." Now the truth that you need to mark down is that this man began to plan for his future, and Jesus is going to take this story and say to us as believers "You need to start planning for your future." Now notice how long he said "So he called in each one of his masters debtors, he said how much do you owe and he said 800 gallons of olive oil the manager said take your bill, sit down quickly lets make it 400." Now people would ask about this story, seemingly many people would jack the price hoping they would get part, sometimes there was a commission involved and what the man was saying "I'll forgo my commission or I'll forgo the big price and what I want to do is make a friend out of you." He asked the other man "How much do you owe?" He said "1,000 bushels of wheat. He said "Take your bill and make it 800." Now listen to what Jesus said, the master commended the dishonest manager because he was smart. Not that he was good, but that he was smart. Listen to what he said, Jesus said "The people of this

world are smarter in dealing with themselves and their kind, than all the people of light." I don't know if that hits you between the eyes or not but it does me. Now listen to what Jesus said, plan for your future "I tell you use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourself so that when it is gone, you will be welcome into eternal dwellings."

Choir Sings: Find Us Faithful

In the middle part of the book of Luke, there are three stories that Jesus gave us to who people relate to material things. The first is about a young person, he has unhappy where he was. He was thinking if he could get somewhere else he would be happy. And he thought if he had some money he would be happy. Well one day he got some money, he didn't earn it, it was given to him and then he went out and thought for a while he was happy. All of these stories, a big event takes place. In the young man's life the big event that took place was he ran out of money. He found out that money does talk, it says "Good-bye." And for him it said good-bye and then he began to realize that life is not found in what you possess, and that when he lost everything he found out what really was important about life.

The second story Jesus gave is the last part of chapter 16, it is about an older man. He had lots of money. His whole persona was wealth, but he used his wealth to build barriers between him and other people. Then the big event came in his life, he didn't run out of money, he ran out of time and he died. He recognized that there are no U-Hauls on hurts. And what he found out was not only can you not take it with you, but what he found out was you can be a success in this life and a total failure for the next life. And he had invested everything he had in this life and made no provisions for the next life.

The third story is the story I read for you today. It was a man who had everything going his way and then one day he lost his job. Everything he had put his hopes and his dreams in was gone and then he sat down and he said "I'll tell you what I am going to do, I'm going to try somehow to make provisions for my future." And Jesus then turn to those who listened to him and said "This man is smarter than many of you. Many of you are investing in that which is going to one day be in the past. I want you to invest in your future." And the greatest people who have the greatest future in the world are believers. We understand that we are here for a short period. In the next life we are there for eternity. How foolish then to spend all of our energy investing in this life and not spending any of our energy investing for the next.

And so Jesus came and gave us three spiritual truths that we ought to start planning for our future.

The first truth He gave is that we ought to be ashamed that people who invest only in this life sometimes do a better job than we do investing for our future. He said sometimes the business people of this world are smarter than you are. A missionary heard about an unreached people group. The Lord laid on his heart to go share the story of Jesus with them. He made extensive preparation, it was a hard trip, finally came through the jungle

on this group of people. He was introduced to the Chief, told him why he was there. The Chief invited him into his hut to where they could talk. The missionary said that as he went into the hut and his eyes got use to the darkness, he realized in a part of the room there was the Chief's wife who was sewing on her Singer sewing machine. And he recognized that as a messenger of Jesus Christ, he was years late of the local Singer sewing machine man of selling her part of his wares. And Jesus said look in the world, there are people who use their imagination, people who use their creativity, people who are willing to give 80 hours a week, get on a plane and fly all over the world to be able to get money for themselves and their family who are not willing to do anything to invest in their spiritual future. Sometimes we as believers ought to hang our heads in shame, that other people put us in the shade when they are willing to give themselves for monitory things and you and I are not willing to give ourselves with any degree of sincerity and effort to spiritual things.

Dr. John Besonio, is the Pastor of First Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. He said when he was a young minister there they invited him to come over to a church on a Sunday night and to speak. He said he walked into the building and he said that the building was not painted very well, the carpet was ragged. He said he noticed in the group that there were about 50 people. He said that when he got up to speak about 10 had already phased out. He said right before he got up to speak he said they sang and exciting hymn "Day is Dying in the West." He said I looked around and I said there is alot more dead here than day. And so he spoke, somebody said "Thank you very much", gave him his check and he walked out. He said he went across the street to the drug store, he had a sore throat, walked in lights were on everywhere, modern, fancy. A man met him at the door and said "Sir, how can I help you?" He said "I have a sore throat." He said "Our pharmacist is here, we have a pharmacist around the clock, come on around the back we will find out what the trouble is." He said the pharmacist prescribed me some medicine, he said "I looked around there were displays hanging down, there were balloons everywhere, there was music, people were happy." He said "I walked out the door and a man shook my hand and said "Sir, thank you very much we appreciate your business."

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Now why is it that we as believers put all the burden on them and never ask ourselves the question "Why aren't we doing a better job? Why am I not doing a better job? Why am I not spending the energy to develop my life as a believer?" And Jesus said first of all you need to sit down and ask "Where is your energy really going?"

Second thing he said, You need to understand that the best investment you make with your money is when you invest it in people. We have people in our congregation who are professional financial advisors, they do a wonderful job. But if you were to ask, according to the Bible, what is the best investment you can make? Jesus is very clear, people! Where can you get your greatest return? People! Jesus said what you need to understand is that there is a currency of Heaven and the only thing that is going to survive death and go to Heaven is people. So if you want to lay up treasures in Heaven, if you want to invest in that which is going to last, then what you do is you invest yourself in people.

I have not heard what had happened to her, her name is Andrea Yeager. I remember her as a Phnom tennis star, 14 years old, she was in the finals at Wimbledon. She came on the scene and she was gone. And then I learned that at age 18 she had a shoulder injury and couldn't play professional tennis anymore and so like this man in the story she asked herself the question "What am I going to do now?" Andrea Yeager helps kids learn how to play tennis. But it is a special kind of kid, it's kids who have cancer. She has camps where they come and she teaches them how to play tennis. Listen to her story:

"You get very spoiled being on tour. You get courtesy cars, five-star hotels, thousands of people clapping when you hit a good shot. It's easy to forget what is really important in life, I forget it alot less lately." She understood that life's greatest investment is investing in people.

You need to ask yourself today, more than how your stocks are doing, you need to ask yourself how many people have you invested yourself in. How much money have you given to help a kid go to camp? How much money have you given to buy a Bible? How much money have you given to help \$17.00 to feed so many families for a whole month? You see it is easy when most of us, who have more then we really need anyway, spend our time asking how many more consumer reports can we read to ask what is a better car to buy or how many more stores can we go in to buy clothes that we really don't need. How many more times are we going to go out to eat at a fancy restaurant and never ask ourselves the questions, "What part of my life and my money is being used to help others?"

Judy and I have a good friend, his name is Dewey Dunn, he is a professor at the medical school at VanderBuilt University, he is a Gastrointerologist. Dewey and I went to Undergraduate School together, he was a student and I was enrolled. He went on to

become a very skilled medical professor. If you ever get around Dewey, he doesn't talk about being a doctor, he doesn't talk about being a professor, he doesn't talk about his students, he doesn't talk about all of the latest things in Gastroenterology. What he will be quick to tell you is about the last trip he just got back from an under developed country to help some children to get well. He will tell you that he now has enlisted 1,000 doctors who go with him all around the world. He will tell you that he hasn't had a vacation with his family for the last 20 years. His vacation time he spends to go over seas to the poorest parts of the world to try to help. And what he will tell you is how he is trying to save his money, and other things, so he can give it to people who really need it.

He understood that life is more that what I can get, life is in what I can give. Jesus said to invest your money in people. Then He said in this way, invest in that which is going to be waiting for you when you get there. Now all of us know that there is going to come a time in our life where we are going to leave everything we have. There will come a time in every person's life that is here that they will give away your clothes, put away your momentous and all that will be left is maybe a picture. And when people begin to think that way, the people of the world say "Then what you need to think about is what you are going to leave behind, you need to provide money for your family." But then those who think, according to the world, think another way and that is "What else are you going to leave, they ask?" Are you going to leave kindness? Are you going to leave love in people's lives? Are children going to be able to say that they taught me the way of life? Or maybe you have invested in an institution or maybe you have invested in a cause and they are going to be able to say "He/She made the world a better place to live." Surely you need to think that way, is the world going to be better when finally you leave it? But that is not what Jesus said. What Jesus said was, in what way have you invested? That when you leave this world and go to your reward, that there are people up there who will say I am here because of what you did. Let me ask you, when the offering plate comes by in a moment, do you understand that we are not investing in bricks and lumber? We are investing in people. And long after you are gone, some little child is going to come into the children's building and learn about Jesus Christ and you were a part of that. And when you give your \$17.00 to help the people who are hungry in Africa, and with that they are given a tract to tell them to know about Jesus Christ and you put \$17.00 down and one day they go home and read that tract in their language and they learn about Jesus Christ and you go into glory and that little child looks at you and says "I am here because of what you did." And because you are a Sunday School teacher and sit down with a child and helps him know Jesus Christ and you get to glory, my questions to you is "Do you know and do you care and are you investing in people who are going to greet you over there?"

Some of you say today "Well this story is all about rich people and I am not rich so it doesn't apply to me." Listen 80% of the world's wealth is owed by 20% of the world's population. When you say you are not rich, I ask you "Compared to who?" Are you rich compared to Bill gates? NO! Are you rich compared to a lady who will take her clothes off to get some corn to put in her blouse so that her family can live? You bet your rich! And so my question this morning is not do you have enough to get by, most of you in this

room do. The question I am asking you is "But are you as interested in your investments in glory as you are in your investments in this life? How rich are you in the light of eternity?"

Do you understand that it doesn't make any difference what you have, it makes all the difference of what has you. And if what doesn't have you is investing in your future, than you are climbing a ladder that is leaning against the wrong wall. Charles Young is a friend of mine who is the Pastor of a little mission church in Morgantown, West Virginia, I went up to lead a revival for him. We met in a rented building there were about 40 of us sitting on metal chairs and a young fellow from the University of West Virginia was in the service on Tuesday night and came to me afterwards and said to me "I am very interested in learning how I can become a Christian." So I sat down in the corner of that little rented hall and told him how to become a Christian and the next night when I spoke and the invitation was given that young man walked down. Most people come walk to me and shake my hand and I welcome them. But he came and he was so overcome, he just sank down in front of me and just put his arms around my knees. The next morning I was flying out of Morgantown and Charles and his wife took me to the airport, and when I got to the airport I realized that young boy was there. When I went to the plane I saw him wave, close enough that I could see his lips say "Thank You." I understand from this story that when I get to glory and I get there after him, he is going to be there. And he is going to wave again and say Thanks. And then I will understand more than I can even faintly understand now, that was the best investment of time I could possibly spend.

When you invest in people who don't know Christ, invest in hurting people and needy people and help them to know about the God who loves them and cares for them, then you understand what material things are all about anyway. It is to invest in people who are going to greet you in glory.

There are people in this room today who need very much to give your heart and your life to Christ. You found out already that this world is not what it is all cracked up to be. You need to get some things right about what really is important and you want to give your heart and your life to Christ. There are people in this room today who are Christians who say we want to come because we realize what is really important in life and we want to come and move our life and our membership, or I want to come today and make some other decision. If Christ has been working in your life then you need to come this morning.

We are going to stand together as we always do, sing a hymn and provide you an opportunity to come forward and make your decision for Christ. I'm going to ask you right now, will you let Christ work in your life? And right now you will make your decision publicly for him.

Let's stand and sing.