

## **The Lost Focus**

September 18, 2016

### **Luke 16: 1-13**

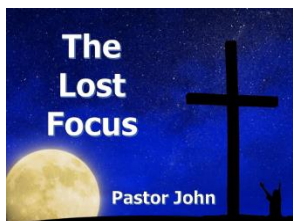
<sup>1</sup>Jesus said to his disciples: A rich man once had a manager to take care of his business. But he was told that his manager was wasting money. <sup>2</sup> So the rich man called him in and said, "What is this I hear about you? Tell me what you have done! You are no longer going to work for me."

<sup>3</sup> The manager said to himself, "What shall I do now that my master is going to fire me? I can't dig ditches, and I'm ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup> I know what I'll do, so that people will welcome me into their homes after I've lost my job."

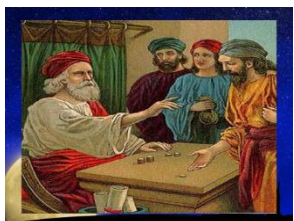
<sup>5</sup> Then one by one he called in the people who were in debt to his master. He asked the first one, "How much do you owe my master?" <sup>6</sup> "A hundred barrels of olive oil," the man answered. So the manager said, "Take your bill and sit down and quickly write 'fifty'." <sup>7</sup> The manager asked someone else who was in debt to his master, "How much do you owe?" "A thousand bushels of wheat," the man replied. The manager said, "Take your bill and write 'eight hundred'."

<sup>8</sup> The master praised his dishonest manager for looking out for himself so well. That's how it is! The people of this world look out for themselves better than the people who belong to the light.

<sup>9</sup> My disciples, I tell you to use wicked wealth to make friends for yourselves. Then when it is gone, you will be welcomed into an eternal home. <sup>10</sup> Anyone who can be trusted in little matters can also be trusted in important matters. But anyone who is dishonest in little matters will be dishonest in important matters. <sup>11</sup> If you cannot be trusted with this wicked wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? <sup>12</sup> And if you cannot be trusted with what belongs to someone else, who will give you something that will be your own? <sup>13</sup> You cannot be the slave of two masters. You will like one more than the other or be more loyal to one than to the other. You cannot serve God and money.



Our parable today begins with a rich man receiving a report that his manager is wasting his money. The consequence is obvious: the manager is fired. We soon learn that the manager is clearly only comfortable being a manager. He quickly realizes his dire position. He cannot, or will not, turn to physical work as manual labor is an uneducated man's job. He believes begging is also clearly far below his status. It would be very shameful for one like himself. So the shrewd manager comes up with a plan.



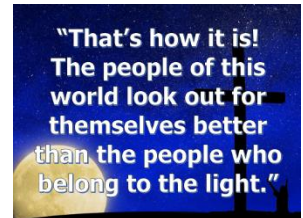
One by one, he calls in those who are in debt to his soon-to-be former master. He begins by asking each what they owe. He asks them to state their debt so they are acutely aware of the amount they owe. He wants them to be acutely aware of what he is about to do. For each debtor, their bill is changed. One who owed 100 barrels of olive oil now only owes 50. One who owed a thousand bushels of wheat now only owes 800. Person after person comes in and walks out with less of a debt. And person after person leaves with a much better impression of the manager. In lowering debts, the manager has created much goodwill for the next phase in his life - when he is in need of work.

In verse eight, the owner re-enters the story and praises the former dishonest manager for acting shrewdly in his new situation. The dishonesty that caused his firing is now indirectly praised. Instead of sulking or simply giving up, the manager comes up with an ingenious plan and makes the most of a bad

situation. The owner, in spite of his own potential financial loss, acknowledges the actions taken by the manager. One commentary suggests that the manager was either taking out what would have been his commission or was removing the high interest that would normally be charged, showing he was following the Mosaic laws against charging excessively high interest. Whichever the case, the owner would still be receiving back most of what he was owed, perhaps lessening the blow.

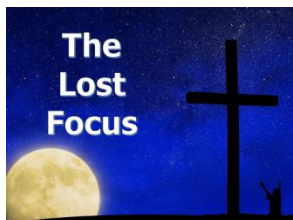
In verse eight, Jesus begins to reveal the application of the parable to the disciples that he is teaching. In verse eight, Jesus says,

*"That's how it is! The people of this world look out for themselves better than the people who belong to the light."*



Like the owner, Jesus is kind of praising the shrewd manager.

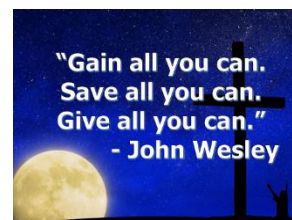
Jesus is also calling God's children to be as diligent in assessing the long-term effects of their actions as those who do not know God are in protecting their earthly well-being. For us today, Jesus is saying that Christians should apply themselves to honoring and serving God as much as secular people apply themselves to obtaining prosperity in this world. The long-term consequences of how we live our life add weight to Jesus' observation. Money is temporal. As Christians, faithful stewardship in this life leads to an eternal reward. Our focus must remain on the eternal. We cannot lose our focus on God. When the world becomes our center and guide, we have lost focus.



Next, Jesus speaks of how we are to live out this parable. In verse nine, Jesus advises us to be generous with our wealth. He says to use our “wealth” to make friends for ourselves.

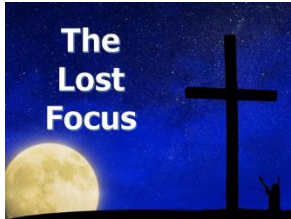
Wealth or possessions are not to be hoarded or used selfishly, Jesus says, but are to be used to make friends. The idea of being generous and giving is one Jesus visits frequently. The opposite of it would be to always pursue and then to tightly hold onto the wealth we have. This does lead us to be selfish, to try and take advantage of others, and to be unfaithful to God as our focus is ever on the things of this world. But if we are generous with our wealth, we will use it in ways that please and honor God. If our nature is to be generous, we will be generous in all areas of our life. We will be generous not only with our money, but also with our time and our use of the gifts and talents that we each have been blessed with.

John Wesley spoke of wealth and money as well. Wesley would summarize the application of this portion of our parable this way: “Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can”. Wesley urges us to gain all we can, but within bounds. We should be gainfully employed and our work should be done diligently. Through



our labor, Wesley would advise us then to save all we can. He saw money as valuable and thought it should be spent wisely. For Wesley, money must not be spent on trivial or luxurious items or to gain recognition from what we own. If we follow these first two guidelines, then practicing the third will follow. If we gain and save all we can, then we are able to give all we can. Wesley preached caring for our own needs first and then releasing all else to the care of our

brothers and sisters in need. The focus for Wesley is outward. When it becomes inward, we have lost focus on God.



Both Jesus and Wesley are also speaking of character, of who we are at our core. Jesus illustrates this when he says in verse ten, *"Anyone who can be trusted in little matters can*

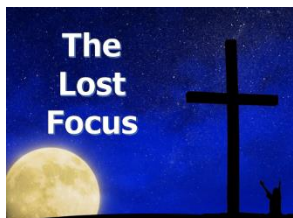
*also be trusted in important matters."* In our parable's context, Jesus is saying if you can handle wealth well, then you will be trusted with more valuable things as well. If we are selfish with small things, we will also be selfish with bigger things. If we are generous with small things, we will also be generous with bigger things. In other words, we are who we are. This is also true of our spiritual lives as well. If we care well for what God has given us in this life, then we can expect much of God in the life that is to come. For Wesley, God would shine forth in all aspects of your life. God would shine forth at work, in your daily life, and in your giving. Much of it boils down to being good stewards of all that God has given us.



This leads us to the question: how do we care well for what God has given us in this life? I think it begins with the question of who or what we choose to serve. In verse

thirteen, we read, *"You cannot be the slave of two masters. You will like one more than the other or be more loyal to one than to the other. You cannot serve God and money"*. In this context, money is the key struggle. But money is just one of many potential idols. We could substitute time, resources, gifts, and

talents here. Much of this debate comes down to how we view money, time, gifts. Our key questions are these: Is money God's or is it ours? Is time God's or is it ours? Are gifts God's or are they ours? We all know the answer to these questions.



Like we talked about in the "Simple" series, God must be our priority. Nothing else can be ahead of God in our lives. But we often place things ahead of our relationship with God and we sometimes place things far ahead of that relationship. To

illustrate, allow me to share a story:

*The story is told of a prosperous, young investment banker who was driving a new BMW sedan on a mountain road during a snowstorm. As he veered around one sharp turn, he lost control and began sliding off the road toward a deep precipice. At the last moment he unbuckled his seat belt, flung open his door, and leaped from the car, which then tumbled down the ravine and burst into a ball of flames.*

*Though he had escaped with his life, the man suffered a ghastly injury. Somehow his arm had been caught near the hinge of the door as he jumped and had been torn off at the shoulder.*

*A trucker saw the accident in his rearview mirror. He pulled his rig to a halt and ran to see if he could help. He found the banker standing at the roadside, looking down at the BMW burning in the ravine below.*

*"My BMW! My new BMW!!" the banker moaned, oblivious to his injury.*

*The trucker pointed at the banker's shoulder and said, "You've got bigger problems than that car. We've got to find your arm. Maybe the surgeons can sew it back on!"*

*The banker looked where his arm had been, paused a moment, and groaned, "Oh no! My Rolex! My new Rolex!!"*

God gives us material possessions so we will enjoy them, not so we will worship them. God gives us material possessions so we can share them, not so we will worship them. God gives us material possessions so we can bless others with them, not so we will worship them.

When we worship what we have, we cannot worship God. Our focus is not on God; it is on ourselves and on our things. Then we have lost focus. Jesus calls us to be good stewards of all we have. We should not be selfish, but we should be generous and faithful in using what we have been blessed with. Then we will possess all of the future riches that God so desires to bless us with. Then our focus will not be lost, but will be firmly on God. May it be so in our lives this week and always. Amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) What is it that you have that is hardest to give to God? It is your time, your money, your possessions, or something else?
- 2) What fears or other factors keep us from being good stewards of all that God has blessed us with?
- 3) How can we better keep God as our focus or priority? What allows us to better focus on God's desires instead of our own desires?
- 4) Pray for God's guidance this week. Ask God to help you to be a great steward of all that God has richly blessed you with.