

18 September 2022

Based on 2 August 1998 (Elaine)

Luke 16:1 – 13

**Children of Light****Doing what is right and being accountable**

I know that it is easy to point the finger at others and blindly ignore our own faults, so we do need to look out for that trap. I know too that people in the public eye can come in for a lot of unfair, unwanted and unjustified criticism, sometimes even character assassination. I'm all for public accountability but I don't subscribe to the view that "anything is fair game, after all they chose to seek fame". That said, there is a place for holding those in the public eye and especially those in office to account – whether it be leaders in big business, in government, local or national, or in the church, to account. I'm not being party political here and it isn't altogether a new problem, though I do think it is getting worse, but ethics in public life seems to be regarded by an increasing number as an optional extra and by more than a few, as a hindrance to getting things done. Why should those who have the responsibility of running a company or a country be hamstrung by ethical constraints? There are many instances of boards taking ESG (Environmental Social and Governance) issues really seriously, and I wouldn't want to tar all politicians with the same brush of being anti ethical but it is a sad indictment if any in positions of real leadership think that they are somehow above ethical constraints and are not only above the law, but believe themselves to be above the moral law too. We are ALL answerable – if not to the people, then to God for the way that we live and treat others – and "doing the right thing" is still to be held up as not only honourable, but the standards to be expected from us all and most certainly our leaders and those who have influence over us. Certainly, we are to do what is right not just in our own eyes, but in line with those ethical rules that are in place to encourage right behaviour, though ultimately, we are accountable to God. We most certainly need to move away from those in authority (in whatever sphere) thinking they have the right to do what they like – or any notion that it is "ok, unless you are caught". We're looking at Luke 16 today and on the face of things our lesson comes from someone with very dubious ethical standards!

**The Shrewd Manager**

Thinking about today's passage, do you really think Jesus was advocating fraud or under hand tactics? Of course not! The manager in the parable had been lazy and careless. He knew he was going to get the sack but made one last ditched effort to save his job. He called in all the people who owed his master money and offered them large discounts if they settled immediately. Perhaps they had long standing debts, perhaps debts that were seemingly irrecoverable – never going to be paid back. But working on the premise that getting something was better than getting nothing at all he at least recouped some money for his master – and was praised for it!

Jesus wasn't teaching how we should conduct our business affairs. This certainly wasn't Jesus' course on business ethics! He was making the point that in general people can be very shrewd when it comes to handling their finances – more shrewd than Christians – BUT THAT THERE IS MORE TO LIFE THAN MONEY. We must be shrewd – not just about money – but about life – and knowing what we do about Jesus and his teaching – the shrewd Christian knows

### 1. **People matter more than things** v9

People last eternally. Material possessions don't. It doesn't matter how much time and effort you put into acquiring more and more goods, the best of everything, they don't last. Neil Simon the American singer is quoted as saying "Money brings some happiness, but after a certain point it just brings more money". There was a report in the Daily Express some time back which told of an old Chinese farmer who had buried his life savings in his yard for safe keeping, the equivalent of £1500. Five years later he dug it up to discover that was worthless – eaten away by mould and mildew. A very disappointing, if unsurprising outcome, that ties in with Jesus' teaching. With an eye to eternity Jesus wants us to "invest" in people – not just our money but our time and effort too. With unemployment looming and practically no chance of a positive reference the shrewd manager made friends with his master's creditors. His methods were shady, but he realised that he was going to need all the friends he could get. You can't buy true friendship – but Jesus does want us to use the time we have in this life, the material things that we've been given, to make friends, to share his love and to "invest" in things that REALLY matter – that count in his reckoning. He is not interested in our bank balance or the effect we have on the economy – but he does want us to seek treasure in heaven. We'll be making a start on that if we see that **people matter more than things.**

### 2. **Money is a trust, not a possession** v10 – 12.

Get a programme on TV that's dealing with economics, forecasts, market strategies and 99% of people will switch off (their minds, if not the TV). But apart from news of what the government or the energy companies are going to do help with the horrendous cost of living increases most of us are just not interested. Politicians get all worked up about economic policy and thousands earn their livings doing nothing else but working on economic planning but for most of us – it holds no interest for us – apart from the practicalities of how we are going to pay the bills. There is a place for it, but Jesus puts it into perspective. He cuts through all the debates with a different kind of economics altogether – with something much simpler – we don't OWN anything – everything belongs to God. Psalm 24 "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it." We're not in this life to spend our time seeking to acquire more and more and more possessions. There's more to life than that. We all have material needs, food, drink, shelter and safety but that's not the be all and end all. Jesus teaches us that ALL that we have is a gift from him, to be used to please him. Of course, it's not wrong to enjoy the good things of life. He's not a killjoy – but we need to be reminded that everything we have is given in trust – it's

not ours to waste and abuse, it's not simply for our own selfish gratification – it's God's, lent to us – to use for his glory – for others as well as for ourselves. The manager in the parable got so accustomed to thinking of his master's assets as his own that he got a real shock when the books were called in. God is not a tyrant, not an awkward and difficult auditor or over-officious bank investigator. However, he is interested in what we do with the life he has given us – our love, our time, our gifts and abilities as well the material things we have – and he has every right to be, for they are HIS - on loan to be used to please him. How different would things be in our lives if we really took this seriously?

### **3. Priorities matter v13**

On the face of it people can be chasing after all kinds of different goals – some chase money, some power, others sex, others fame and popularity, some happiness, some success but Jesus is saying that these things are not end in themselves. At the end of the day, they are not what life is about. You can't be intent on serving these goals AND serving God. That is not to say you can't have a rich christian or a successful christian but ultimately priorities matter. When the comes to the crunch who or what do you serve? God or another? Pushed to choose between being popular or being true to God what do you do? Forced to pick between a shady business deal and honouring God which way do you jump? If trampling on other people is the only way to get on, do you do that or do you hold to Jesus' teaching to love your neighbour as you love yourself? These are practical issues that show if God really is our Master. Priorities matter – if material things were all that mattered then we would be stupid to allow matters of faith to get in the way of wealth, power, ambition, success or whatever is our goal – but they are not. People matter, Jesus matters, the future is more than how much we've got. Jesus gave everything he had because he loved us and if we love him, something of that love will shine through our lives, and will affect the way we think of the “things” we have. Let folk see that people matter to you more than things, that the material possessions you have (whether that be a lot or a little) are not so much yours as God's on loan and that the real priorities in your life are the ones that God counts as important.

May the Lord bless you! Amen