Sermon Series: The Twelve Marks of Christian Maturity
Sermon Title: You Increase Your Standard of Giving

Text: Luke 16:1-13 -- He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. 2 And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' 3 And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' 5 So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' 7 Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' 8 The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. 9 And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. 10 "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. 11 If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? 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."

Introduction: The United States now has 2.3 billion square feet of self-storage space. It represents more than 78 square miles of rentable space, an area that is about three times the size of Manhattan Island. ***The Self Storage Association*** notes that, with more than seven square feet for every man, woman and child, it's now "**physically possible that every American could stand—all at the same time—under the total canopy of self-storage roofing**." You might be interested to know that **one out of every 10 households** in the country rents a self-storage unit. Now I know that there are a lot of legitimate reasons to rent storage space, but **does it strike you as odd that we have to build more than 50,000 self-storage facilities in the United States just to hold the overflow of the stuff that we've acquired over the years**? While America is facing some economic instability, it doesn't seem to have diminished the amount of material goods that we possess.

This morning, we're going to be studying **the Parable of the Unrighteous Steward**, a story that our Lord used to **issue a warning** to anyone who might be tempted to fall in love with riches. Though Jesus shared it with His disciples, the Pharisees also heard and reacted to the parable, assuming Christ meant it for them (**Luke 16:14 -- The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him**). **Now, before any of us is tempted to write off this message as one that is only meant for the ears of the wealthy, we would be wise to remember that the principal character in the parable was merely a steward of someone else's property**. There is no indication that he, himself, was prosperous. It is more likely that he wasn't. That's why he had to plan for his provision in the future.

In Biblical times, HOUSEHOLD STEWARDS (*or managers*) were very common in the homes of the wealthy. **Joseph, the son of Jacob, served in this capacity for a man named Potiphar** (**Genesis 39:4 -- So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had**) **as did a woman named Joanna who was a Christ-follower (Luke 8:3 -- and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager**). They had many responsibilities including … (**1**) distributing pay to those who worked for their master (**See Matthew 20:8**), (**2**) providing money to the servants who labored in the home so that they could purchase food for themselves and/or their families (**Luke 12:42 -- And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?**) and (**3**) even monitoring the education of the master's children (*one of the words for "**steward**" can also be*

*translated as "**tutor**"*). **If they were faithful, they enjoyed long-term employment and were usually very much appreciated. If not, they were dismissed with haste**.

The Lord used the principle of stewardship to help believers understand what is expected of us since He has entrusted much to our care until His return. That's the point of this parable. And so here in our twelfth and final message in the series, "**The 12 Marks of a Maturing Christian,**" we will consider spiritual maturity that is evidenced in stewards of our Lord's resources who routinely ***increase their standard of giving***. Here are four principles that our Lord has for us on the subject, as outlined in His Word in **Luke 16:1-13**.

DON'T BE WASTEFUL OF GOD'S RESOURCES (**Luke 16:1-2 -- He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. 2 And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'**). **This parable is predominantly about wealth and what we do with it**. We know this for two reasons: **(1)** the word "***mammon***" in verses **nine, eleven and thirteen *refers to one's riches***; it is an Aramaic word that means "***that in which one puts trust***;" and **(2) Verse 14** tells us that **the Pharisees reacted to the parable by sneering at Jesus because they were lovers of money** (i.e. covetous people), **and they knew He was directing this parable at them**.

In the story, the unrighteous steward was found to be squandering the resources of his master. In **Luke 15:13** *the same word is used of the Prodigal Son who wasted his property in reckless living*. **Enough evidence was gathered that the charge could be proven, and so the man was immediately fired**. ***Wasting the master's riches was a serious offense to be brought against a steward who was expected to be very prudent with the wealth entrusted to his care and even to grow it whenever possible***. **That's also the point of another parable found in Luke 19:11-13 – Jesus said, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' The expectation was that they would grow his resources, and those who did were rewarded in proportion to their success.**

Now, of course, the audience to whom Jesus delivered the story of the unrighteous steward was composed of His disciples as well as some of the spiritual leaders of Israel (*i.e., the Pharisees*). **The warning was issued to both groups because everyone is susceptible to the worship of material things over God. You may remember that the disciples were given a stewardship of the secret things of God** (**1 Corinthians 4:1-2 -- This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy**), **yet one of them (Judas)` gave in to this particular temptation when he betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver**. As for the Pharisees, they were stewards of the Law, yet became lovers of money.

Let me stop here for a word of application. GOD DOES NOT BLESS US SO THAT WE CAN HOARD HIS RESOURCES OR SQUANDER THEM. You may be thinking to yourself, "***I certainly don't do that***," but for the sake of personal application, let me pry a little bit into your life by asking if you (**1**) **have used God's money to purchase a lottery ticket lately** (*by the way the odds of actually winning $2 in the mega jackpot is one in seventy-five; the odds of winning the big money—one in 175,711,536*); or (**2**) **have used His money to support some sort of habit to which, if you're honest with yourself, you are in bondage**?; or (**3**) **have used that which God has graciously given to you to acquire another toy that you don't need but will help you fill up more of your leisure time**? Considered in this way, perhaps ***all of us*** need to take a look at ourselves when it comes to being wasteful. (**Review: DON'T BE WASTEFUL WITH GOD'S RESOURCES**.)

DON'T BE SELFISH WITH GOD'S RESOURCES (**Luke 16:3-8 -- And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' 5 So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write**

fifty.' 7 Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' 8 The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light). The man in this story looked to protect his future against impending hardship by endearing himself to those indebted to his master. **We must understand that Jesus did not commend the man for acting dishonestly**. The "***lord"*** or ***"master"*** in the parable is the one who applauded the move**. Jesus simply pointed out that the man had enough sense to make friends for himself through the use of "unrighteous mammon**." ***Instead of taking the money and spending it on his own needs, which would hardly have been enough to last him for very long, the steward won their favor and future considerations by significantly reducing the amount they owed***. **Christ is quick to point out that if worldly people have enough sense to use their resources for the benefit of others** (*admittedly for selfish purposes*), **how much more should God's children do so to bring blessing to others**?

Some time ago, **the Chicago Tribune (9/1/96)** ran the story of **Buddy Post**, "***living proof that money can't buy happiness***." In **1988**, he won $16.2 million in the Pennsylvania Lottery. Since then, he was convicted of assault, his sixth wife left him, his brother was convicted of trying to kill him, and his landlady successfully sued him for one-third of the jackpot. "***Money didn't change me***," insisted Post, who at the time was a 58-year-old former carnival worker and cook. "***It changed people around me that I knew, that I thought cared a little bit about me. But they only cared about the money***." Post attempted to auction off seventeen future lottery payments, valued at nearly $5 million, to pay off taxes, legal fees, and several failed business ventures. He planned to spend his life as an ex-winner pursuing lawsuits he has filed against police, judges, and lawyers who he says conspired to take his money. "***I'm just going to stay at home and mind my p's and q's,***" he said. "***Money draws flies***." **My response to Buddy is that riches are only detrimental to us if we are constantly trying to figure out ways to keep it all for ourselves**. If we give it away, however, it can bring widespread blessing (**See 1 Timothy 6:17-18**). (**Review: DON'T BE WASTEFUL WITH GOD'S RESOURCES; DON'T BE SELFISH WITH GOD'S RESOURCES**).

DON'T BE SHORT-SIGHTED WITH GOD'S RESOURCES (**Luke 16:9 -- And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.**). **One of the lessons our Lord wants us to learn from this parable is that we are expected to use our resources with a view to eternity**. **Not that we can "buy" our way into heaven**. If that were possible, the rich would not have to worry about their place in eternity. But listen to what our Lord says in **Matthew 19:23-24 -- And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God"**. THE ONLY WAY WE CAN BE SAVED FROM THE PENALTY OF OUR SIN (WHICH IS ETERNAL DEATH) IS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST ALONE. However, our Lord does expect us to use all the good things that God provides us in a way that blesses others and that will not be forgotten when we are with the Lord (**2 Corinthians 5:10 -- For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil; Matthew 25:34-36 -- Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me'**). THIS IS WHAT JESUS MEANS WHEN HE TELLS US TO LAY UP FOR OURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN (**Matthew 6:20**). **Living with an eye to the future is a wise thing to do!**

If you've ever had to wait in a long line at your local Starbucks, you probably already know—millennials spend a lot of money on coffee. **But it turns out many are spending more cash on caffeine than investing in their future**. According to a report from **Acorns Money Matters**, 41 percent of nearly 2,000 millennials—individuals born in the early 1980s through the early 2000s—surveyed admitted to spending more on their morning brew than contributing toward their retirement plan. One millennial from **Phoenix, Arizona** put it this way: **I'm not putting money away because I'm not making money. We live in the moment, maybe more than others, so the concept of thinking about the future or retirement isn't necessarily as big of a deal as it was in the past**. But it's not just

coffee where millennials are making poor financial decisions. The survey says that just five percent of **young millennials (ages 18-23)** are investing at all. **But on the flip side, 39 percent feel anxious about their financial futures**. **According to the report, the average American spends approximately $1,100 a year, or $3 each day, on coffee**.

Not that coffee is a bad thing, but God expects believers to invest their wealth in the things that really matter. Sadly, there are many in the body of Christ that are spending nearly everything they have on worldly desires that have no future because the world and all that is in it is passing away (**See 1 John 2:17**). Its honors, pleasures, and possessions will not last. The only thing that will is the **Kingdom of God**. That's why it is such a good investment. (**Review: DON'T BE WASTEFUL WITH GOD'S RESOURCES; DON'T BE SELFISH WITH GOD'S RESOURCES; DON'T BE SHORT-SIGHTED WITH GOD'S RESOURCES**).

DON'T BE UNJUST WITH GOD'S RESOURCES (**Luke 16:10-13 -- One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is *dishonest* in a very little is also dishonest in much. 11 If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? 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**). **From Christ's perspective, it seems that people cannot remain neutral when it comes to riches**. Either we are faithful with them or we are not. The **NKJV** translates the word "***dishonest***" in **verse ten** as "***unjust***." It means '***not in conformity with what is right***.' Jesus says that one will always be able to tell the trustworthy stewards from those who are not by how they manage the worldly wealth that has been entrusted to their care. If they use these things per the master's wishes, then they are worthy of even more responsibility (i.e., **true riches refer to matters that are close to the heart of God**). If, however, they use them for sinful (selfish) purposes, then they will be denied the privilege of greater responsibility in the kingdom. (**Review: DON'T BE WASTEFUL WITH GOD'S RESOURCES; DON'T BE SELFISH WITH GOD'S RESOURCES**).

This passage concludes with a summary statement. "***No servant can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money***." If we are to learn the lessons of this parable and to avoid becoming "**lovers of money**" like the Pharisees, then each of us must do two things:

- **First, give yourself to God.** Acknowledge that He is your Master and that you are but a steward of His possessions.
- **Then, give everything else to God.** In one sense, He is already the owner of it anyway (**Psalm 24:1 -- The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it**). Still, it is helpful when we recognize that fact and determine we will use every good gift for His glory and trust that He will meet our needs along the way.

Conclusion: **One day, John Wesley's house burned to the ground. Some people found him and said, "*John, we are so sorry to tell you this, but your house has just burned to the ground*."** John Wesley said, "***That's impossible***." "***No, John, your house has burned to the ground***," they replied. "***That's impossible***," he said again. "***But John, we saw it with our own eyes. Your house is gone***!" Once more, the evangelist, pastor, and founder of Methodism responded, "***That's impossible. You see, I don't own a house. God gave me a place to live in. I only managed that house for Him. If He didn't put the fire out, then that's His problem. He'll have to put me somewhere else***." Those are the comments of a man who truly understood the principle of stewardship. We own nothing, but merely manage God's possessions. May we use them for His purposes.