

Christian Generosity: The Gauge of our Spiritual Wellbeing

Lk 16:1-13

12 May 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

My brother & sister, and dear children,

Imagine the Last Day – the day when our Lord Jesus comes! Imagine how wonderful it would be if (in His grace) He will position you & me on His right, and then say to us, “*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... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”¹*

Yes, how wonderful it will be, if the Lord could receive us and say this to you & me!

Well, *what message* are these Last-Day words sending to you & me right here where we are now in 2019?

My brother & sister, is it not this: “**Dear churchgoer, do you want a gauge for your spiritual health?**” “**Well, then look closely at your Christian generosity & kindness!**”

Warning: In saying this, you & I had better be careful, for there are *many* people who may be generous. Yes, there may be lots of non-Christians who are also generous!

But here’s the point: You see, there is one thing that should *never be missing* from the Christian’s life – and that is generosity, especially generous giving towards the spreading of the Gospel, and giving to those who are in need – the poor, the widow, the persecuted...

Yes, these two words, *Christian* & *generosity*, are like a horse & carriage – they always go together!

Now, that does not mean that I’m preaching prosperity theology! No, I’m not preaching that the *motive* for Christian giving should be selfish gain – in other words to give *so that* I can receive abundance in return!

No, the generosity our Lord is speaking of (and that I’m talking about) is a generosity which is born out of gratitude for God’s greater generosity toward us in the giving us His Son – an enormously costly Gift!

So, the true Christian will be generous & kind!

And our Lord tells a parable to explain this!

Here are the three main points of this sermon...

- The Shrewd Manager’s Generosity
- The Christian’s Generosity
- The Gauge

The Shrewd Manager’s Generosity

Our Lord is speaking to His disciples,² and the Pharisees are also listening!³

¹ Mt 26:34b-36, 40b

² The word *disciples* probably refers to more than just the twelve. See, e.g. Lk 6:13, “**And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles...**”

Also Lk 10:1, “**After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.**”

³ Cf. Lk 16:1 **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...”** (Emphasis mine)

He tells them a parable...

In this parable there are three main parties:

- A master, yes, a rich owner of large farmlands.
- Then there were renters – people who were renting sections on the master’s large farm. The way they paid their rent to the master was by way of produce! Yes, at the end of the harvest they would pay the master X amount of olive oil or of wheat or dates or figs or whatever other kind of produce.
- Thus, there were these two: the master and his renters.
- But then, between the master and his renters, there was also a *manager*! It was his task to see to it that, come harvest time, the renters pay the master the agreed-upon amounts of produce they were growing.

Well, one day, someone – our text does not tell us who exactly – came to the master and told him that his manager was squandering (wasting)⁴ his possessions!

The master believed what he was told! So, next thing, he calls in the manager and fires him! All indications are that this manager was not guilty of fraud, but that he was just wasteful.⁵

Well, the master also told the manager to hand over the account books!⁶

And the manager does not voice any objections – he accepts his guilt!

So, this manager is fired and has to hand over the books!

However, it seems he still has time between being fired and handing in the books!

So, as he walks back to his office, he thinks by himself: “O, what on earth am I going to do now?”

“Where will I get another job?” “I can’t do manual labour (dig)⁷ for I’m not strong enough!”

“Neither do I want to sit and beg, for that’s beneath my dignity!”

Suddenly, he gets this “Aha” moment! “Aha, yes!” “Why have I not thought of this before!?” “I will do something very generous to my master’s renters, so that once I’m without work here, they will have told everyone on this farm and in town that I’m such a kind & generous manager.”

“That might quickly land me another management job!” “Ooh, but I have to act quickly before the master sees what I’m going to do now, and also before the renters find out that I have actually already been fired!”

So, what does this manager do next?

Also cf. Lk 16:14 ***The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.*** (Emphasis mine)

⁴ διασκορπίζων Present Active Participle Masculine Singular of διασκορπίζω^b: (a figurative extension of meaning of διασκορπίζω^a ‘to scatter,’ 15.136) to spend foolishly and to no purpose—‘to squander, to waste.’ ἐκεῖ διεσκορπίσεν τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ ζῶν ἀσώτως ‘there he wasted his money in reckless living’ Lk 15:13 (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 574). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁵ Or else the master would have had him thrown in prison (cf. Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.768)

⁶ Yes, “Give account of your stewardship/management” (ἀπόδος τὸν λόγον τῆς οἰκονομίας σου) means as much as “Surrender the account books!” (cf. Gächter, apud Bailey, K.E. 1983. Poet & Peasant. Grand Rapids, MI : WB Eerdmans. p.97).

⁷ σκάπτειν Present Active Infinitive of σκάπτω: to dig into the ground, specifically in connection with turning over the earth for agricultural or gardening purposes—‘to till the ground, to dig.’ σκάψω περὶ αὐτὴν καὶ βάλω κόπρια ‘I will dig around it and apply fertilizer’ Lk 13:8; σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω ‘I am not strong enough to dig’ or ‘... to work the soil’ Lk 16:3. For another interpretation of σκάπτω in Lk 16:3, see 19.55 (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 515). New York: United Bible Societies).

Well, he knew that, already at the beginning of the season, all farmworkers on his master's land had signed a contract re how much of their produce they would give to the master at the end of the harvest! So, he knew they had signed a *promissory* agreement!⁸

He also knew that it was common practice that, if the season was tough (due to drought or hail or flooding), then *he and the master would sit together*, take the books in which the renters have promised what they would pay come harvest-time, and then, in compassion, reduce those amounts for each renter!⁹

But look how sneaky this manager now gets! Because he has only just been fired, nobody except he and his master already know that. If he could act quickly and, without his master's consent, reduce for each renter the amounts they had promised to pay, then he could win their friendships – yes, then he would be in their good books! And then they would spread the news all the way to town of what a gracious/kind manager he is!

And so, he summons the renters to his office! But he doesn't summon them all together at the same time – no, that would make his sneaky plan too obvious to them and his master!

So, he summons the renters one-by-one.¹⁰

Again, in a very sneaky manner, here's what he asks the first one: "Tell me, how much do you owe *my* master?" (See, my brother & sister, this manager does not tell the renter that he has actually already been fired!? No, he still talks of the master as, "...*my* master!")

Well the renter answers, "I owe our master one hundred baths of olive oil!"¹¹ (That's about 3,500 litres)!¹²

Says the manager, "Well, here's good news for you!" "I have decided to give you discount – even fifty percent!" "So, quickly¹³ (for I'm in a hurry), sit down and change the 100 baths of oil to 50 baths" (i.e. about 1,750 litres).

Wow! You wonder what sort of small talk went on as this delighted renter gives his signature next to the changed amount! Did he say, "Thank you, dear manager!" "Amazing!" "You're such a generous man!"? "Why are you doing this?" And did the manager then say, "Well, I just felt so sorry for you paying such a hefty amount for your hard labour!"?

Well, next, the manager summons a second renter to his office and asks also him, "How much have you promised to pay at the end of the harvest?"

Says the renter, "I promised a 100 cor of wheat." (My brother & sister, that's about 39,000 litres of wheat – again a huge amount).¹⁴

"Well," says the manager, "come, take your bill and change it to 80 cor instead of 100!"

⁸ Cf. Hendriksen (ibid:769). Also cf. Bailey (ibid:100-101) for an even more elaborate explanation of how such contracts were made in that culture.

⁹ Cf. Bailey (ibid:101)

¹⁰ Cf. Lk 16:5 ***So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'***

¹¹ **ἔλαιον, ου n:** oil extracted from the fruit of olive trees—'olive oil' (used as food, medicine, for burning in lamps, and as perfume when mixed with sweet-smelling substances) (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 77). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹² **βάτος, ου m:** a Hebrew liquid measure of between eight and nine gallons or approximately thirty-five liters—'bath'... (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 708). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹³ ταχέως pertaining to a very short extent of time—'quickly, hurriedly, swift, speedy' (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 643). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹⁴ **κόρος, ου m:** a Hebrew dry measure for grain, flour, etc., of between ten and twelve bushels or about 390 liters—'cor.' ἑκατὸν κόρους σίτου 'a hundred cors of wheat' Lk 16:7. In order to reflect more accurately the total quantity involved, one is justified in English to employ an expression such as 'a thousand bushels of wheat.' An equivalent metric unit could be thirty metric tons (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 708). New York: United Bible Societies).

Again, the small talk would have been something like, “Wow, Mr Manager, I don’t know how to thank you!” “You’re so kind and so generous!” And that would have been just what the manager wanted to hear!

The parable tells of only two renters whom the manager has helped so generously. But, of course, there would have been more¹⁵ – all of whom he helped in the same general way!

And none of these renters had the slightest clue that this manager had actually already been fired. Neither would they have known that he was operating without the knowledge of his master!

So? What does the manager now do?

Well, he takes the books and hands them over to the master!

Of course, the master instantly sees the changes! But what can he now possibly do? If he would now call all his renters back and said to them, “Sorry, this was all a mistake; we must change the books back to what you all have originally promised to pay,” then instantly his own reputation would go down to zero! He cannot risk this! So, what does he now do? Well, he can only make the best of the situation! This is what he must have said to himself: “What a clever crook this manager is!”¹⁶ “Yes, what a clever crook!”

So here’s a question: Did the master praise his manager for his *dishonesty*? No, not at all! He only praised his *shrewdness* (as v. 8 says).¹⁷

And is this not also what people do/say (even you & I) when burglars manage to break in at a bank and rob millions of dollars despite the best burglar protection that bank had installed? Yes, don’t people say about such burglars, “How clever/smart!”? Surely, this doesn’t mean that you & I are recommending the burglars for medals of bravery! No, we’re just shaking our heads in disbelief that someone was even able to do such a thing!¹⁸

But regarding this shrewd manager, here’s the point our Lord Jesus wants to highlight, i.e. that, through his shrewdness and a *generosity* motivated by selfishness, this manager earned for himself friends – lots of them for the day when he would be without work! Yes, even through his shrewdness, he planned for his future!

You ask, “But what does our Lord Jesus want to teach us through this!?”

Well, that brings us to point 2...

The Christian’s Generosity

So, what is Jesus saying with this parable?

Well, He says in v.8 ***For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.***¹⁹

In other words: If *worldly* managers go to such length to show generosity in order to ensure for themselves a great welcome in the future – yes, if worldly managers who are entrusted with *trivia* compared to the *eternal riches* of the *Eternal Master*; if they do so well, then why should the sons of the light (Christians) not go to more lengths to, through their generosity, ensure for *them* a great reception in the future?

Yes, in v. 9 our Lord says as much as, ***I tell you, use worldly wealth*** (money & possessions)²⁰ ***to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it*** (this worldly wealth [also this life on earth]) ***is gone, they*** (these friends) ***will receive***²¹ ***you into eternal dwellings.***

¹⁵ See again v.5 ***So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’*** (Emphasis mine)

¹⁶ Well-explained by Hendriksen (ibid:769-770)

¹⁷ Cf. v.8a ***The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.***

¹⁸ Illustration borrowed from Hendriksen (ibid:770-771)

¹⁹ Cf. v.8b NIV84

²⁰ *Mamōna* (μαμωνᾶ) Noun, Genitive Masculine Singular of *mamōnas* (μαμωνᾶς) (an Aramaic word): wealth and riches, with a strongly negative connotation—‘worldly wealth, riches’... (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 561). New York: United Bible Societies).

²¹ δέξονται an Aorist Deponent Subjunctive 3rd Person Plural of **δέχομαι**: to accept the presence of a person with friendliness—‘to welcome, to receive, to accept, to have as a guest’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996).

You ask, “But is Jesus then saying to us, ‘Christians, give money and be generous & kind *so that you can earn your salvation* with God?’”

No, He’s not saying that, for He of all, knows that that’s not how we are eternally saved!

No, He is saying, “Be generous & kind, not to try and *save* yourselves, but to ensure for yourselves a *great reception*²² on that Last Day.” “Look, on the Last Day when I (your Lord) will stand there, and I will put you on My righthand side and I will say to you, ‘Come into My kingdom, you who gave Me food when I was hunger... you will say, ‘But when did I feed You?’” Then I will say to you, ‘...*as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.*’”²³ “Then you may ask, ‘Which brothers of Yours, Lord?’”

Well, then the Lord Himself will point them out to you – the child in the Sudan whose education you supported, the missionary in Papua New Guinea, the elderly neighbour next-door whom you have constantly made meals for, the unmarried young mother whom you counselled and supported, the weekly offering you faithfully gave to your local church, the donations you used to make to the organisation that brought relief to the persecuted brothers/sisters, the Christian education you supported, the student for the ministry to whom you donated your humble contribution, the people whom you often invited over for a meal!

And they will receive you and add joy to your welcome into your eternal dwelling!

Perhaps you ask, “But preacher, is this a true Biblical teaching?”

And the answer is: Yes, it is, for look, our Lord says it in v.9 of our text, ***I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it*** (this worldly wealth [also this life on earth]) ***is gone, they*** (these friends) ***will receive you into eternal dwellings.***

Look, did not the Apostle Paul preach a similar truth to the Christians in Corinth – those who had come to faith in Christ because of Paul’s ministry – yes, those who will give Paul much joy on the Day of Christ? Indeed, Paul told them (in 2 Cor 1:14), “***we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.***”²⁴

So, my brother & sister, I pray that on that last day, you & I will not only hear the very good news, “Enter My kingdom...,” but that you & I will see a whole host of friends whom we’ve made while we were on this earth – friends we’ve made not because of selfish reasons, but because the love Christ showed to us so compelled us that we couldn’t help but serving them!

My brother & sister, you & I are managers in the kingdom of God! If the shrewd manager, through his generosity, made friends with *selfish* motives, why will you & I not, *for Jesus’ sake*, employ our generosity to make eternal friends?

Here’s the last point...

The Gauge

Well, you ask, “But, come on preacher, are you willing and able to gauge your *own* deeds of kindness & generosity?” “Yes, you who are preaching to us, can you apply this ‘litmus test’ of generosity to your own actions?”

All I can say is, “My brother & sister, if I try to do that, I find I cannot, because if I should try to recollect whatever deeds of kindness/generosity I might have done to others in my life, I know (I know for sure) I will fall short by a long shot of what the Lord Jesus desires of His people.

But this I can tell you: If I reverse the situation – yes, if I think of the many people who were kind and generous to me & my family... and if I only take the first 6 years after our migration to New Zealand when we lived in Avondale & were part of the Avondale Reformed Church – yes, if I think of those dear brothers & sisters in Christ who were kind & generous to us (like babysitting our children, bringing food, and encouraging us with God’s Word, and some even giving us money), then, my brother & sister, I can envisage that, on the Last Day as I will be standing there in the presence of my Lord, He will point to me and say to at least about 50 people who helped us in those 6 years, “Thank you all for showing such kindness & generosity to Pieter and his family. And those 50 Christians will

[Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 452). New York: United Bible Societies).

²² Consider the word “receive” in v.9 (Please cf. previous footnote)

²³ Cf. again Mt 26:40b

²⁴ NASB95

not just be from the Reformed Church of Avondale, but also from other denominations across Auckland (North, South, East, West).

These were people who showed that they did not serve two gods – God and money! But that they served God *with* their money!

Yes, I was on the receiving end of an awful lot of generosity & kindness, and I'm indebted to many people – an indebtedness which gives me all the more reason to be generous myself to others. But, of course, the greatest reason as to why I (and you too) should be generous and kind to others (not just in money-giving, but in time-giving and skill-giving), is because of the greatest love my Lord (your Lord) has shown to us in the giving of His Son to us!

My brother & sister, may this, the Greatest Love ever, be the ongoing motivation for you & me to be kind and generous. Yes, may we ongoingly live in awe of God's generosity to us. That is the only reason – the reason that surpasses all other reasons – as to why you & I (the Christian) should show love in action!²⁵

AMEN (2815 words excluding footnotes)

²⁵ Cf. Js 2:14-26 about the fact that faith without works is dead! Also remember Francis of Assisi