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Luke 16:1 - 16:18



Gospel of Luke - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg examines Luke 16:1-18, which includes the parable of the unjust steward. He suggests that the steward's actions were not necessarily criminal, but rather clever and resourceful, potentially even benefiting those who owed the master money. Gregg sees the subtext of this parable as emphasizing the importance of using worldly wealth for spiritual gain and eternal well-being. He also explores Jesus' teachings on divorce and remarriage, with Paul later providing additional guidance for believers who marry non-believers.

Transcript

Let's turn to Luke chapter 16. In this chapter we have two important parables, very interesting, both of them unusually interesting parables, but also both uniquely challenging. In fact, the first parable in the chapter is the parable of the unjust steward.

I remember when I first began in the ministry and began to allow younger Christians to ask me Bible questions. I used to say, there's two passages you can't ask me about because I can't make sense of them. And one of them was this parable, the parable of the unjust steward.

I was very happy to find when I read commentaries that they didn't understand it either. It made me feel a little better to know that I had trouble with it and so did commentators have various problems with it. It's got a variety of problems to solve and I'll make some reference to them.

But the truth is that in the years that have followed, I feel that I have gotten some insight. In fact, to tell you the truth, it no longer seems quite so difficult to me, but that's only because I've settled on a certain understanding of it that makes sense to me. Some of the difficulties that others find it may still remain.

So I'm going to, of course, share with you what some of those difficulties are and then also how I understand it. Then before the end of the chapter, we also have the story of Lazarus and the rich man, which is also an unusual story, unique actually. It's the only passage in the entire Bible or the entire New Testament anyway, that seems to describe

the immediate post-mortem condition of an unbeliever.

And of course, there's a believer in there too, but we have other references in the New Testament that seem to be relevant to the post-mortem experience of believers. But as far as what do unbelievers experience, we don't have anything in the Bible that even addresses it except possibly this parable or this story, the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. I'm saying parable, though some people are convinced it's an actual story and that that's a possibility.

But we have both of these parables in this chapter and in between them, there's sort of some miscellaneous material, most of which has to do with the handling of money. Now, interestingly enough, both parables have something to do with the handling of money too. And so some feel that the material in this chapter has been collected in order to focus on that.

Just as in the previous chapter, there are three parables. All of them have to do with the forgiveness of sinners and God's rejoicing in the repentance of those who had been lost and have now been found. Chapter 15 was entirely devoted to that one subject.

Chapter 16, I can't say it's entirely devoted to the subject of money, but it does seem to have, most of the verses in it, have something to do with the subject, including both of the parables in the chapter. Beginning at verse 1, it says, He also said to his disciples, There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, What is this I hear about you? Give me an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.

Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig. I am ashamed to beg.

I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his master's debtors to him and said to the first, How much do you owe my master? And he said, A hundred measures of oil. So he said to him, Take your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty.

Then he said to another, How much do you owe? So he said, A hundred measures of wheat. And he said to him, Take your bill and write eighty. So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly.

For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, some manuscripts say when it fails, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much, and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust in much.

Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit you to your trust's true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? We have the story and then we have Jesus teaching following the story, apparently making some application of it. What makes this story difficult are a number of things. One thing is it's not even clear where the parable ends because verse 8 says, So the master commended the unjust steward.

The word master there is kurios, also the word translated Lord in some places. And so some feel that the kurios who commended the steward is Jesus. That is, he ended the parable at verse 7, and then we have Jesus' commentary.

The man made these alterations in the debtor's bills and thus ends the story. And Jesus then is the master who commended the unjust steward for dealing shrewdly, saying that the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. The latter part of verse 8, the second sentence in it, probably is Jesus' own comment.

However, the word kurios in verse 8 is the same as has been used through the entire parable, which is no doubt referring to the steward's master rather than to Jesus. But that's one of the controversial things, knowing exactly where the end of the parable really is. One of the things most difficult is knowing why the master would commend his steward, who obviously made arrangements that were to the detriment of the master's finances.

He went out and found people who owed his master money and reduced the amount in order to ingratiate them to himself so that when he found himself out of a job, they would take him in. They owed him something because he'd done them a favor. Now, some people have thought that what the steward did must have been honest enough and legal enough because the master didn't disapprove, but the master actually commended him for his shrewdness.

This has been interpreted by some to suggest that what the steward did was reduce the amount of the debtors by the amount of his own commission. And so he was saying, I'll forfeit my commission on this deal to make it easier for you guys who owe my master money. And that'll show me to be a nice guy, a generous guy, and it will, of course, make them feel that they are indebted to him for doing something kind.

In this case, he wouldn't have done anything dishonest. He just gave up his own commission, his own markup. Another view is that the amount he reduced the debts is some unfair markup that his master had added to it and that he was actually just reducing the price to a reasonable price that would not necessarily make his master the poorer, but would not also include his master's excessive markup, that the amount that they owed was too much.

Now, these ingenious suggestions have made it possible to say the steward was doing

something good and honest and commendable and would explain why the master might not be upset with him. However, nothing in the parable suggests that what the steward was doing was anything quite like this. Presumably, the listeners to the parable are supposed to have everything they need to understand the story provided in the story, and there's nothing that would suggest that there was some kind of unfair markup or some kind of commission that was being reduced off the amount owed.

And furthermore, Jesus specifically refers to the man as an unjust steward. It says in verse 8, So the master commended the unjust steward. So what the steward, the steward is an unjust man.

Now, some will still salvage their theories that what the steward did in this case was simply reducing some extra fee that had been added on to the debts. And they'll say, well, Jesus calls them the unjust steward based on the fact that at the beginning of the parable, he is said to have wasted his master's good. And it may be he's referring back to the steward as one who was being fired because of his previous unjust dealings and not referring to these latter dealings as unjust.

But again, the parable doesn't tell us that the man was unjust prior to these dealings. He had wasted goods, but that could be because of incompetence or laziness or something else. We're not told that he was unjust or doing criminal things with his master's goods.

That's not the accusation made against him. So these are some of the things that make it hard to know what to make of the parable. I believe that we should just take the parable at face value without trying to read in a lot of other implications because no doubt the parable is intended to contain all the information necessary.

Now, what we have is a man who is a steward. That means that he was hired to manage. He's a manager of his master's goods.

And the comparable situation would be perhaps if someone's managing a small business for its owner. Let's say a small shop or, you know, a fast food restaurant or something. Somebody owns that place, but they don't usually run it.

They hire somebody to manage it. Now, the manager has authority to hire and fire people to do all kinds of things in management in order to make the business profitable, to run sales if they want to. The manager has the right to do all kinds of arrangements, even to give discounts if they want to, as long as in the long run they are enriching the owner.

The owner hires a manager because the owner wants to make money, and the manager's duty is to act in the place of the owner, doing such deals as the owner himself would do if he wanted to take the time, in order to make the owner, not the manager, richer. The manager usually has his own salary, and that's not going to change much

unless he gets fired, but he's nonetheless supposed to make the business profitable for the owner. That's what a manager does.

That's what a steward is. And so this man had that kind of an arrangement. He was sort of a business manager for somebody who had, obviously, dealings in grain and oil.

This oil would be olive oil, so these are agricultural products. And there were people who owed his master stuff. And he was the one to set prices and to collect the debts and to do things like that.

This is what he did. Now, somehow, before the story begins, he apparently had done not so well. He had not managed to make his master as much money as his master had hired him to do.

And so the master says, I'm going to find someone else. I'm going to fire you. You've kind of been wasteful of my stuff.

We don't know exactly what kind of waste this was, and frankly, we don't even know if the accusation was true. The master had heard an accusation against the man, but I think we're supposed to assume it was true because we're not told otherwise. The man had not been a good manager.

The master had not profited with this man's employment. So he says, you're being terminated. But he didn't terminate him on the spot.

The man obviously had some little bit of time, a day or two, perhaps. And he says, you need to draw up the record of your accounts and turn them in because you're being terminated. And there is some difference of opinion among commentators as to whether this termination was instantaneous or delayed until he would turn in his books.

If it was instantaneous, then the servant had no business going around making deals with the clients. He was no longer his master's steward and therefore had no authority to change prices or to collect the debts or do anything like that. And many people think this is the way it is, that that's how it was.

This is why he's called unjust because he was actually acting as a steward deceptively, going to these clients as if he still was employed but he wasn't employed and as if he still had the authority to manage these affairs but he didn't have any authority to manage the affairs. This is one theory that I've encountered. But I think there's a problem with it because if in fact this was the arrangement, if he really had been terminated and he went and made these arrangements, then they would do him no good because the people he made the arrangements with would realize that the arrangements were illegal as soon as they discovered that this man had been terminated previously.

In other words, if he was doing something illegal, he's not going to be earning himself a legitimate place in these people's homes for the rest of his life. He's going to earn himself a place in jail because he's doing fraudulent dealings which would be punishable at law. And the discounts that he gave these people would soon be canceled because it would be brought up that the man had no authority to make such deals.

It seems to me the man was to be terminated, that he had a little time left, probably only a day or two, enough to draw up the books and turn them in. And as soon as he turned them in, he'd be terminated. I think he's given notice here.

That would make sense of things, it seems to me, because then he would say, I am still a steward. I'm still in the employment of my master. I've always had the right to make special deals with customers because I'm the manager here.

So I'm going to make some special deals before my time runs out here. I'll be gone in a day or two, but right now I still have opportunity to make some friends of my master's clients. I'll give them some good breaks.

Now, if this is the case, then he actually made legal transactions. Now, why would this be called unjust if these were legal? Well, let's put it this way. If they're illegal, he'd be going to jail soon, so that wouldn't be something he would do if he's trying to make plans for his future.

I believe they were legal, but they were unethical. Some things can be legal, but unethical. In other words, his master's already communicated his intentions to fire him.

His master's already indicated, I don't trust you to manage my things anymore. The master perhaps had not been so careful as to fire him on the spot because he still needed him to work a little bit to finish up the math and prepare the records and so forth, and did not know that he would use those last opportunities to go make some more deals that he was probably not really, in the mind of the master, supposed to be doing. But he was technically employed.

He was technically able, as a steward, to make such deals, and therefore, I believe what he did was unethical, but not necessarily illegal. He could be called unjust in terms of his relationship to his master. He had cheated his master out of a bit of money, doing things that his master would not have approved of.

But he hadn't done anything illegal because he really did have the authority to do this. He did have the opportunity, and he seized that opportunity. Now, the master commends him, and you wouldn't expect that to be the case when a master loses some money like that, but I'm going to assume that the master was very, very rich, and the loss of a few cores of wheat or oil or whatever is not going to damage him too much.

It's going to benefit the steward because the people who are paying the master less are

going to be thankful for the good deal they got, and therefore, they'll be inclined to be ingratiated to the steward. Now, what he expected them to do, I don't know. Maybe he expected them to give him a job.

Maybe he's saying, they'll receive me to their houses, that is, to be a steward of their house and work for them. Or whether he's looking for a mere handout, someone to let him live with them because they've gained so much by his deal he worked with them that they'll let him stay with them for free. I'm not sure exactly what arrangement he's looking for.

I suspect what he's hoping is that these people will be favorably disposed toward hiring him. Though, if the last transaction he did with his previous boss wasn't good for his boss, it's not really clear that they would want to hire him. So, some of this is unexplained.

The only thing we know is that the man was going to be fired. He knew he was going to be fired. His employment options were limited.

He felt that he was not strong enough to dig ditches, and he was too proud to beg. And therefore, he had to find another job or at least another place to live, maybe for free. And he felt like, I can get some people indebted to me who will take care of me when I'm out of this job.

And so, he did these transactions. Now, if the master was incredibly rich and he had many, many debtors, and only a few of them were given such a discount, as we only read about two cases. There could have been more, but perhaps we're supposed to understand the man just made them, in a few cases, gave some real good deals to people.

It cost his master something, but maybe not enough to make the master really angry. I mean, he might have been a little irked by what the guy did, but his state of being irritated might have been overruled by how impressed he was by the shrewdness of the guy. The guy is not commended for his morality.

He's commended for his shrewdness, how clever he was, that he used the opportunity he had to make these deals. So, some of the assumptions I bring to the story, which are not agreed on by all commentators, though some would agree, is that the steward didn't do anything technically illegal. He had a limited legal opportunity to do the kinds of things he did.

The master didn't necessarily anticipate him doing that. He kept him in his employ only a short time to give him a chance to turn in his books, but he seized the brief opportunity he had to make arrangements for his well-being in the long term. Now, this is, I think, the basic meaning of the parable.

Some may find other meanings. In fact, I've heard preachers find very, very different meanings from the parable that I never would have dreamed of, but I think the point is this, that Jesus is saying we are all, in some respects, in the position of that steward. Now, we shouldn't be doing unjust things, and it's important for us to realize that in a parable like this, not everything about the person is commendable, but there's one point that he's making.

It's sort of like the parable of the unjust judge that we find two chapters later, at the beginning of chapter 18 of Luke, where certainly the unjust judge, who doesn't care about the widow's needs, caves in because she pesters him so much. This unjust judge stands, in the parable, sort of in the place of God, the one being petitioned, and who answers the prayers of somebody who keeps praying, but certainly Jesus is not implying that God is unjust, or that he's uncaring like the judge. In a parable like this, sometimes the story is set up in such a way where the characters are not all that we should hope to be, or that God would want us to be, but the point that is being made is only a single point.

The single point is that this man was shrewd enough to recognize that his opportunities were limited to make provision for his long-term well-being, and that is the point that Jesus makes of the parable. Presumably, we're supposed to understand this as the subtext, that we all, in this life, have a limited opportunity to make the arrangements necessary for our long-term, that is our eternal, well-being. The reason I say that is that the man's desire was to provide a welcome to himself in houses of other people.

He was going to lose his position in this house, and he says, I'm going to ingratiate people to me so that they'll receive me into their houses. And look what Jesus says in verse 9, I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, or when it fails, the money fails, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. Now notice, the man was just looking for some place to live for the rest of his life.

Jesus applies it to looking for everlasting habitations, habitations for eternity. So this has to do with preparing for your eternal well-being, and would apparently be suggesting that the short time, perhaps the day or two, that this man had, where he was forewarned that he's going to be terminated, compares with the short life we have, the short opportunities we have. If this man had just drawn up the books and done nothing, he would have squandered that opportunity to do the things he did, and he would have no benefit long-term.

Likewise, if we do nothing in our life here to make provision for our eternity, we'll find our time runs out, and we're left without those benefits that we could have arranged for if we'd seized the opportunity that we have now. The idea being that this man's life in the parable is seen in two parts. There's the part after he learns he's going to be terminated.

Between that and his termination may have only been hours or days. But then there's the rest of his life, and in the rest of his life he wanted to be somewhere secure, and so he had this very short time at the beginning of the parable to do something about it. That short time compares with our entire lifetime, which is indeed very short compared to eternity.

And the rest of his life, after he's terminated, compares with eternity. Termination would then refer to death. Until we die, we have a limited time to do the kinds of things that will, after we have died, prepare us to be in eternal habitation.

That, I think, is the whole point of the parable. Now, some of the wording is still difficult, even if we allow for that. For example, it says in the second part of verse 8, For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

The sons of light, no doubt, refers to godly people, and the sons of this world to ungodly people. And he may be simply saying, it's often the case that worldly people, working for only worldly gain, apply themselves to it more diligently than godly people do. Now, that is, then, godly people apply themselves to worldly gain, although that's not always the case.

The point he's making is, you do find shrewd, worldly people who will see the opportunities they have, and they see the limits on their opportunities, and so they strike while the iron is hot. They actually are diligent in seeking to procure their own financial well-being. The sons of light often are not as shrewd about that.

It may be because the sons of light don't care as much about their financial well-being because they have other concerns, or he may be saying the sons of light often don't realize, as much as they should, how diligent they ought to be in the time they have. They do have the opportunity to make good for eternity, but they often may not understand how important it is to make the arrangements and be diligent about them, as worldly people do toward their own financial well-being. He says, I say to you, verse 9, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon.

Now, this expression, unrighteous mammon, is difficult because mammon is an Aramaic word that means money or possessions, but it's not in itself unrighteous, and certainly Jesus isn't saying we should use unrighteous means of money management, and so this has been perplexing to commentators. Why does Jesus call it unrighteous mammon? Some translations just rephrase it as worldly wealth, replacing the word unrighteous with worldly, but worldly and unrighteous are not synonyms, and therefore it's very difficult to know what to do. Perhaps he's simply saying in this parable this man did things that were not righteous.

He was an unjust steward. His money management was unrighteous, and money often is used for unrighteous purposes, maybe more often than not. Maybe since the unrighteous

people are the ones who make the biggest deal about making a lot of money, maybe he's just associating for the moment because of the context of the parable, money with this unrighteousness, but it still is awkward.

It's still awkward that he uses the expression, and in fact, he uses the expression again in verse 11, therefore if you've not been faithful in unrighteous mammon, apparently he's suggesting that you can be faithful in unrighteous mammon, so being faithful in unrighteous mammon would not be being unrighteous. So this remains something of an unsolved problem. Why does Jesus refer to it as unrighteous mammon? In any case, I think it's the NIV that paraphrases it as worldly wealth, and that is what he has in mind.

The reason why he calls it unrighteous mammon is perhaps inexplicable, but what he's referring to is not difficult to know. He's talking about worldly wealth, and he says, make friends for yourselves by use of this, of your money, so that either when you fail, that is when you die, or when it fails, that is when the money runs out, either reading is possible from different manuscripts. But in any case, he's talking about when you die, or when your money runs out, but that runs out when you die too.

At the end of your life, they, who they are, is not clear, may receive you into everlasting habitations. Now, since the habitations that they are welcoming you into are eternal, we may conclude that whoever they are are people who are in heaven. They could be angels, they could be righteous people who've gone ahead, and who welcome us as we come in.

They could even be the people that we have benefited by the use of our money. Making friends using money, no doubt means something more spiritual than it sounds like. Like use your money so that you might win souls, that you might help the poor, that you might benefit people in a positive way, so that they will be there in heaven to greet you and to welcome you there.

That the habitations that they welcome you into are eternal habitations. You're going to leave this habitation and go into eternity someday, and it's great if you can make some friends here now using your money. That's make some converts, benefit some people who presumably will end up in heaven, so that when you go to heaven, you can be welcomed by them.

We have in the parable at the end of this chapter a man who died, a beggar who died, and he was welcomed into the presence of Abraham. He was in Abraham's bosom. And so this may be what Jesus is thinking of, that the righteous people like Abraham who've gone on ahead will greet you and welcome you into these everlasting habitations if you've done what you should do with your stewardship here.

Now the whole idea of being a steward, it underlies this entire teaching. This man was a steward of someone else's stuff. And we are stewards of other people.

That's why Jesus has to use the money. We are using God's money and we are his stewards and we should be using it in such a way that will enrich heaven as a result and ourselves too because we will be welcomed into heaven, into everlasting habitations if we've been faithful. Now having said that, I think it may possibly be that verses 10 through 12 are there to put sort of a qualification.

It's possible that verses 10 and 12 are not so much related to the parable at all and are just additional teachings about the use of money. It can be seen that way. But it's also possible that since he has used a parable in which the man who was commended for being a wise and true steward actually did some unfaithful and good things, that he's saying, okay, I'm saying you should use money in such a way as to procure for yourself eternal habitations, but here's the other side.

Don't be like this man necessarily in other respects. This man in one respect provides a good example. Some who saw the limitations of his opportunity and seized them and made provision for his long-term security.

We should all take a lesson from that. However, while we are doing so and while we're using our mammon to make friends, we should observe some higher principles than this man did. Principles of faithfulness, principles of honesty, principles of some other things.

And so he says, he who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much. And he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Now by the way, since the word unjust was also used by Jesus to describe the steward in the parable, he was the unjust steward, it seems like he's warning his disciples about being unjust.

Okay, you should like him prepare for your future, but unlike him you shouldn't be unjust. You should be faithful. In real life, a man who is unjust in his business is not going to be entrusted with more business.

The one who's unfaithful in small things is not going to be given management of other things because he's shown himself to be unfaithful. It's in his character. A man proves himself in these small things and if he's faithful, then he's given more things.

Remember the parable of the pounds where the master said to those who had invested well, the stewards who had invested well, he says, you have been faithful in a few things, I'm going to make you ruler over 10 cities or something like that. If you show yourself to be the right stuff in the lower levels of responsibility, which is this life, then you can be entrusted with greater levels of responsibility in the next life. This rich, this unjust steward, however, would not be a great example of that and I think Jesus is perhaps showing that not everything about the parable is to be emulated.

Therefore, if you have not been faithful in unrighteous mammon, who will commit to you the true riches? No doubt he means by that, rewards in heaven. Or maybe even in this

life. If God entrusts you with some small matter and you're faithful in it, he may raise you up as Joseph, for example.

Joseph was faithful in Potiphar's house. Eventually, he got elevated to, you know, ruling Egypt. And so, it may be that a person who's faithful on the lower levels will even find himself exalted in this life.

But certainly, Jesus is thinking right now about the next life in this passage. And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? Once again, the steward had not really been faithful in what is another man's, hadn't been faithful to his master. And so, if he thinks someone's gonna give him something as a result, you know, this is not entirely realistic.

If you cheat your former master by making me a good deal, and then you want me to hire you as my manager, and you think, well, wait a minute, I'm not so sure I can, you wouldn't do to me what you did to him, you know? So, it may well be that Jesus is saying, and this story has its limitations. This story has a lesson to be learned, but there are some things about it that aren't entirely maybe realistic, and certainly are not things to be emulated. Then he says, verse 13, Now, this is also found in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6. What does it mean to serve money, or serve God? He's talking about being the slave of one or another master.

What does a master do? Well, first of all, a master dictates your behavior. If you're God's servant, then God's will will be dictating your behavior. If you're money's servant, if that's your master, then your behavior will be dictated by concerns of increasing your money.

You'll just be shrewd, but not necessarily ethical. You'll do what will increase your financial advantages, but not necessarily be serving God, because you may actually cross over the line on some things that God would wish you to do in trying to get yourself rich. It happens all the time.

You can't be serving God and serving money. They can't both be your master, in other words. Now, you can be serving God and managing money well, but that's different.

Serving God means you're putting his concerns and his ethics and his will first, and it may be that as a consequence you also manage money well. But if you're putting the concerns of money and wealth first, you're definitely going to be going against God's will at some point or another, because frankly, you can make more money by being dishonest in many cases than by being honest. So, you can't serve both.

Now, verse 14. Now, the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided him. And he said to them, You are those who justify yourselves before men.

But God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. Now, this statement, what is esteemed highly by men is an abomination in the sight of God, underscores the different way in which God sees things from the way man sees things.

Remember, Paul said in Romans chapter 12, Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. In Romans 12 too. Your mind has got to be brought around to God's way of seeing things, because by nature we see things the way man does.

Man's values and man's philosophy is always being forced upon us from advertisements, from conversations we overhear, from, you know, advice that is given. We're always being, having man's values reinforced, thinking that certain things are valuable, because man, in this life, taking no thought of God, thinks they are valuable. But, in many cases, the things that are highly valued or highly esteemed by men are an abomination to God.

Remember when Jesus told Peter and the disciples at Caesarea Philippi that he would be crucified, and Peter said, No, no, Lord, you can't suffer like that. We're going to defend you. You can't die like that.

And Jesus said, Peter, or he said, actually, Satan, get behind me. You do not value the things of God, but the things of man. Certainly, man's value would be escape from painful death, if you can.

But what about, what if God wants you to die a painful death? Well, man's values are not going to be sympathetic toward that. Peter's values were not. He was mindful of the things of man, not of the things of God.

So, Jesus is pointing out that people actually need a total revamping of their priorities and their values. Their mindset, they need to be renewed in their minds, because naturally enough, we have human values ingrained in us from the culture around us, from our education and upbringing, in many cases. And he says, well, those things that men esteem highly, they're not just things God doesn't esteem highly.

They're an abomination to him. God's attitude toward them is the polar opposite than man's on some of these things. Now, Jesus says that in the context of the Pharisees who are justifying themselves before men, that is, making themselves look good to other people.

So, presumably, people were esteeming the Pharisees, but he's saying, actually, God's value of things and of people is the opposite of man's. You people justify yourselves, but what if God doesn't justify you? What if God finds you abominable? Just because you have acquired esteem in the sight of man doesn't mean that God thinks highly of you. He said, the law and the prophets were until John.

Since that time, the kingdom of God has been preached and everyone is pressing into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail. This is similar to something Jesus said in Matthew 11 about how the law and the prophets were until John.

The point seems to be that the age of the law and the prophets, the old covenant and the laws that were associated with it were valid and binding up to and including the time of John. John himself lived and died under the terms of the old covenant. But his coming was the mark and the indicator that something was changing.

That a new era was coming. John was preaching the kingdom of God is at hand. That means soon the kingdom of God will be here and that will displace the law and the prophets.

John's ministry is represented here as sort of a pivot point, the transition between the vanishing of the old covenant system and the introduction of a new system, the kingdom of God, which apparently replaces the law and the prophets. Therefore it's fairly clear that the law and the prophets pass and are supplanted and replaced by the kingdom of God. Now the kingdom of God was preached as eminent by John and preached as present by Jesus.

So within the lifetime of Jesus this transition took place. When Jesus said in Matthew 12 28, if I cast out demons by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has overtaken you. Or in Luke 17, which is the next chapter we're coming to after this, Jesus said the kingdom of God does not come with observation, but it's in your midst.

The kingdom had come in the person of Christ and that replaces the law and the prophets as a system of ethics and as a description of human duty. And so Jesus indicates that the law has essentially passed but then the next statement is it's easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one tittle of the law to fail. Now for the law to fail would seemingly mean that it would somehow fail to be fulfilled or fail that it would somehow just succumb to time or vanish by itself.

Jesus taught a similar statement in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 where he said do not think that I've come to destroy the law or the prophets. I've not come to destroy it but to fulfill it. Now obviously the fulfillment of the law brings about some changes in it.

What does it mean to fulfill the law? If the law is fulfilled it hasn't failed but it has certainly changed. In Hebrews 7-12 where the writer is talking about how Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek and this is a different order of priesthood than it was known under the Old Testament because the Old Testament had only the order of Aaron and the Levites but Jesus now has a new priesthood not of the order of Aaron. In Hebrews 7-12 it says there being a change in the priesthood there is also of necessity a change in the law.

The law must have changed if there's a new priesthood because the law only knew of one priesthood, that of Aaron and now there's a new one that replaced it. So the law has in fact passed and changed but it didn't fail. Jesus didn't come to destroy it, he came to fulfill it.

Now when something has been fulfilled it hasn't failed it has fulfilled its purpose. A prophecy, for example predicting the birth of Christ in Bethlehem the prophecy in Micah when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the prophecy didn't fail it actually succeeded it fulfilled its purpose but it no longer is something that we don't look at that prophecy to anticipate something in the future still it is no longer serving the same purpose as it did beforehand and the law was that way too it anticipated Christ and he came and he was its fulfillment. Now it's no longer in the same position as it once was.

It's now something that served its purpose and has in a sense been replaced. But it's been replaced in the sense, the usual analogy I use is of adulthood replacing childhood. When a child is born, the presence and existence of a child predicts someday the existence of an adult.

Children generally grow up to be adults when something terribly tragic happens to prevent that. The norm is that a child grows up into an adult and when a child is born you expect there to be an adult someday. In the meantime while the child exists you recognize it as a child but when it becomes an adult you don't see a child anymore.

The child has not died or been destroyed. The child's been fulfilled. The child has reached maturity.

The child no longer exists as a child but it exists as an adult now. But that's different. The law was the childhood of humanity.

The fulfillment is the maturity of humanity. In fact, Paul himself uses that very image in Galatians chapter 4 when he's talking about how humanity was under the law, or the Jews were under the law at least, before Jesus came but when Jesus came no longer were they under the law. He says it this way Galatians 4.1 Now I say that the heir as long as he is a child does not differ from a slave though he is master of all but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the Father.

Even so, we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. He means the law but when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law that we might receive the adoption as sons. And here the word sons is adult sons as opposed to little sons.

Now we were like children he's speaking of himself and other Jews. The Jews under the law were like children. They were heirs of the kingdom but the kingdom had not yet

come and as immature heirs they were kept under guardians, the guardianship of the law itself.

They were under bondage, no better than slave really, just keeping the rules. But the time came when Jesus came that was the time appointed by the Father that the child should be given his adult privileges. So adulthood has replaced childhood with the passing of the law and the coming of the kingdom in Christ.

And so it's not that the law failed the law has reached its climax the law has reached its anticipated end. That's not a failure. Until Jesus fulfilled the law it wouldn't pass and he said that in Matthew 5, he said it's impossible that one jot or tittle of the law will fail, that will not be fulfilled.

But when it's fulfilled it hasn't failed. And Jesus is saying here that when John came that marked the transition from childhood to adulthood in that particular analogy. The law childhood is passing something new, the kingdom of God, adulthood has replaced it.

But that's not a disaster from the standpoint of the law. That's what the law anticipated. Verse 18 Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.

And whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery. Now this teaching about divorce in this particular place is recognized by all commentators as strange to put in this particular place. It doesn't specifically illustrate the idea of the law passing because the law itself never actually said that divorce is adultery.

So he's not saying well as it was in the case of the law where divorce was adultery so it is still. I mean he's not saying anything about continuation of something from the Old Testament here. It's not clear exactly why this is brought up at all in a chapter which is mostly interested in talking about economic concerns.

Now it may have something to do with the sources that Luke used. Perhaps the source he used had the parable of the unjust steward and then this other material but then some other source had the parable or the story of Lazarus and the rich man but Luke added it here which makes the whole chapter look like it belongs in the category of finances except for these words. There's no one really knows why this particular statement about divorce is here but nonetheless we should deal with its contents.

It seems to say that anyone who divorces and remarries is committing adultery in so doing and even the partner the second partner of the divorced person is involved in adultery. Now why would this be? The assumption of course is that a second marriage is adultery for the simple reason that the first marriage is not over. If a single person who's unmarried gets married to somebody they're not committing adultery unless the person they're marrying is married to somebody else but the idea is that the reason there's adultery is because the first marriage is not really dissolved because there really is the

person still married to their first spouse and they're committing adultery by being with the second spouse.

The underlying ethic of this is you can't have two spouses at the same time and Jesus in this particular rendering of his teaching in Luke does not mention any exceptions he just makes it sound like divorce and remarriage is always adultery and the early church actually took this position the early church fathers seemed to believe that there was never any excuse for divorce or remarriage and it was always unacceptable. Now there are some Christians I know who take that position too and they use a verse like this to say so and you can see why they would. Look at Mark chapter 10 we have Mark's version of this saying verses 11 and 12 says, So he said to them, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.

And then Mark adds, which none of the other gospels do, and if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she commits adultery. The other gospels don't even mention the possibility of a woman divorcing because it was either impossible or very rare in Jewish society for a woman to be even allowed to divorce her husband. A man could divorce his wife rather easily.

A woman divorcing her husband well she didn't have quite the same rights and so neither Matthew nor Luke mention even the you know idea of a woman divorcing her husband but Mark does. And we do know there were some cases because Herodias had divorced her husband Philip and come to live with Herod. So and in the Roman world women could divorce their wives.

Mark did write his gospel to a Roman audience and it may be that to his Jewish audience Jesus mentioned nothing about a woman divorcing but Mark or Peter who stands behind Mark's gospel made the application both ways to men and women since in the Roman world it was possible for women to divorce their husbands. It's hard to say but the main thing to observe is that both in Luke and in Mark there is no exception given. It's stated as if it's absolute.

Now this creates a slight interpretive problem when we consider what Matthew's gospel has Jesus saying because Matthew has Jesus speaking twice on the subject of divorce and remarriage and in both places he does state an exception. In Matthew 5.32 in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said but I say to you whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery and whoever marries a woman who is divorced presumably without the cause of fornication which is the condition he gives earlier commits adultery. Now here it sounds like that Mark and Luke's teaching is true with one exception.

It is true that if you divorce your wife and marry another you commit adultery and whoever marries her commits adultery also except where the divorce is for the cause of fornication. Now Matthew mentions it here and also in Matthew 19 it comes up again and

by the way the case in Matthew 19 is parallel to the case in Mark 10 so it's the same occasion, same teaching. In Matthew 19.9 Jesus said I say to you whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.

The same teaching. Matthew 5.32 and Matthew 19.9 both have Jesus teaching on this and he includes the exception but Mark and Luke do not mention the exception so we really have a few ways that this can be resolved. Some people I've known have said well the exception that is included in Matthew is not original that some scribe has added it and in the earlier manuscripts there was no exception.

They say this as an act of faith because there are no earlier manuscripts that lack it in Matthew. All the manuscripts of Matthew include it and so when they say well that's a textual corruption we know from Mark and Luke that there was no exception mentioned and so when we find this exception in Matthew we have to assume that somebody added it later. We don't have to assume that at all.

There are other solutions and since there's no manuscript evidence for any such late insertion of these exceptions in Matthew that solution doesn't seem to be the most to be chosen. There is another set of possibilities. One is that Matthew records the words of Jesus as they really were which included the exception and Mark and Luke are abbreviating the statement and simply leaving out the exception but assuming that it's implied.

This is a possibility because usually when we find parallel statements in the Gospels and one is longer or more qualified in one Gospel than in the other we assume that the qualification that's given in the one Gospel is to be understood in the other one. Let me give you an example of this. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all make reference to Jesus saying that no sign will be given to that generation and Mark's Gospel in particular just leaves it at that.

In Mark 8, 12, Jesus says no sign will be given to this generation. Now both Matthew and Luke also contain this statement of Jesus but both Matthew and Luke have him say no sign will be given to this generation except the sign of Jonah. In Matthew chapter 12 verse 39 and also again in Matthew 16 verse 4 and in Luke it's Luke 11, 29.

So in Mark 8, 12 Jesus is represented saying no sign will be given to this generation but in the parallels in Matthew and Luke it goes further. No sign shall be given except the sign of Jonah. Now what are we to do with this difference? It's similar because one statement seems absolute.

The others seem qualified. Same thing with the divorce statements. Mark and Luke don't have any exceptions, no qualifications.

Whoever marries and divorces or divorces remarriage, that person commits adultery. But Matthew in two places does qualify it. Which way shall we go? Shall we assume that the qualifications given in Matthew are illegitimate? Well, in the case of the sign given to that generation, we all assume that when Mark says no sign should be given to this generation that he's simply abbreviating what we know to be a longer statement that did include one qualification confirmed in Matthew and Luke.

Why not in the case of divorce too? You see, we have to go one of two ways with this. Either Matthew added to what Jesus said because Jesus gave the statement as Mark and Luke presented about divorce without an exception and Matthew added it or Jesus did give the exception and Mark and Luke omitted it. Now, stated that way, it sounds like somebody's been doing some wrong representation of Jesus' sayings.

Either Matthew has added to what Jesus said, something Jesus never did say, or Mark and Luke have left out something very important that Jesus did say. And so, we can either assume that these Gospels are somebody's involved in some chicanery here to modify what Jesus said or we could understand it this way. Maybe Jesus did say it without mentioning the exception.

But Matthew recognized that this was another of the many cases of hyperbole in Jesus' teaching. Jesus often used hyperbole. In fact, when he said no sign will be given to this generation, that's a hyperbole because there actually was one exception.

It sounds absolute, but it's not. Hyperbole is where something is stated in very firm, very absolute terms as if there are no exceptions, but in fact there are. And this is done many times in Scripture.

So it's entirely possible that Jesus did say anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, period. But not intending for that to be taken as if there's no exceptions whatsoever. And that Matthew, being one of the apostles himself, one who was there to hear the statement and certainly one who has had conversations with Jesus off the record for several years, knowing very well that Jesus' statement does allow of some exceptions would then clarify that, well, of course what Jesus meant was not intended to exclude cases where there's been fornication.

You see, we have to either say that the exception exists or that Matthew is not a reliable witness. Matthew either has made something up that Jesus didn't intend or Jesus really did say what he said or Matthew may have added it knowing as a clarification, knowing that that's what Jesus really believed. Though he stated it, perhaps without mentioning an exception, there may well be exceptions that Jesus would allow that Matthew knew very well was the case and may have clarified that, just as sometimes one gospel writer clarifies what Jesus says more than another does.

In any case, we have an interesting enlightenment on this subject from Paul and Paul is

an apostle also and certainly authorized to teach and interpret what Jesus said. And in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says in verse 10, Now to the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord. A wife is not to depart from her husband, but even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.

And a husband is not to divorce his wife. Now that sounds absolute. There's no exception mentioned there either.

It sounds more like Mark and Luke's version of Jesus' statement. No exceptions. But then Paul says in verse 12, But to the rest I, not the Lord, say, if any brother has a wife who does not believe and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her.

And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. Then he says in verse 15, But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

Now to say if the unbeliever departs, this clearly is a reference to leaving the marriage. And he says the brother or sister is no longer bound in that situation. Bound by the marriage covenant.

The unbeliever has broken it and the unbeliever is free. Now it's clear that Paul doesn't seem to mention any exceptions to a man should not divorce his wife and a woman should not divorce her husband. In verses 10 through 11.

But then he gives us seemingly an exception in verses 12 through 15, especially verse 15. In any case, Paul indicates that divorce is always to be avoided unless it's unavoidable. If the unbeliever seeks to destroy the marriage and leave the marriage, then there's not an awful lot the believer can do and God doesn't hold the believer responsible for keeping the marriage together when the unbeliever has destroyed it.

Against the will of the believer. Now there's something else to notice here. The exception that Paul gives in verse 12 is to the rest.

What do you mean the rest? A different group than addressed in verses 10 and 11, obviously. There is a group addressed in verses 10 and 11 and verse 12 is addressed to the rest. That is others than them.

Those who are not in the same category as those. Well, who are those addressed in verses 10 and 11? It says to the married. So we might assume if verses 10 and 11 applies to all married people, then the rest must be to the single.

But verses 12 through 15 is not addressed to single people. It's addressed to married people also. But in a different category than those addressed in 10 and 11.

You see, that's absolutely necessary to understand. Those who are married to unbelievers are a different category than the ones addressed in verses 10 and 11. And those married in verses 10 and 11 must necessarily then be believers who are married to believers.

He gives instructions to believers who are married to believers and then to the rest that is believers married to unbelievers. He gives different instructions. Now there's something else.

To the believers married to believers, he says, Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord. He means by that Jesus also spoke to this subject. He says, It's not me.

I'm not originally this. The Lord did. Jesus taught this.

But when he speaks to the rest, he says, I, not the Lord say. And he means by that I'm giving instructions that Jesus never had occasion to give. Jesus never really addressed disciples who were married outside their faith.

All of Jesus' disciples were married to fellow Jews. They were Jews. Their spouses were Jews.

There was never an occasion to address a Jew married to a heathen. It just didn't come across Jesus' path. He did all his ministry in Israel.

And the Jews were not married to heathen. So Jesus, when he gave instructions about marriage and divorce, Paul says, was speaking about cases where believers are married to believers or in that case, Jews married to Jews. God's people married to God's people.

But Paul encountered something Jesus never did because Paul went out into the Gentile world and among his converts were married people whose spouses did not similarly convert. So a woman might respond to the gospel, but her husband doesn't. He's a pagan.

Or a man might respond to the gospel, but his wife who's a pagan doesn't. So now there's a new situation Jesus never addressed, Paul says. The Lord never spoke about this.

I'm going to have to give my instructions about this. Because Jesus' words don't apply here. And what is it? When a believer is married to an unbeliever it's different.

There's different rules than when a believer is married to a believer. What Paul's saying is the teaching of Jesus on this subject applies only to believers married to believers. The rest there's other instructions for.

The Lord didn't speak about that. Which means that Paul is telling us that when you read Luke or Mark or Matthew recording what Jesus said about divorce, he is assuming no

divorce in a same-faith marriage when a believer is married to a believer. But Paul says now it's a game changer when the believer is married to an unbeliever.

Here's the instructions for that. He said Jesus didn't speak about that. So that should also help us to know how Paul would have us apply the teaching of Jesus.

It applies to believers married to believers. But if a believer is married to an unbeliever and by the way, a former believer is an unbeliever. A spouse who has left the faith is an unbeliever.

Then he says still the believer should never initiate a divorce. We should always see divorce as an evil. It's always wrong for a marriage to break up.

But it's not always a wrong done by the believer. The believer should make sure that he or she is not the one committing the wrong. If their spouse commits the wrong and divorces them, then that's if the spouse is an unbeliever that changes the obligations.

The brother or sister in that case is not under bondage to the marriage. Okay, we'll take the story of Lazarus the rich man next time.