

# Jesus On How To Launder Dirty Money – Part 1

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## Luke 16:

[1] He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods.

[2] And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'

[3] And the steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship 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 people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.'

[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.' And 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 steward 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 mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations.

[10] "He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.

[11] If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, 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 mammon."

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Grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ!

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Do you know who Brad Rutter is? He is an actor who holds the world record for the highest amount of money ever won on T.V. game shows, over \$10,000,000. His total winnings on just one game show are \$4,455,102. To do that he had to ask over 5,000 questions correctly. One game show Brad won a lot of money on is on 5 nights a week and I know you know it, "Jeopardy" with Alex Trebec.

I wonder, if Mr. Rutter had chosen the category, New Testament for \$2,000 and the answer was, "Where Jesus tells us how to launder dirty money," if Mr. Rutter would know the answer. I'm sure you got it. It's Luke, Chapter 16.

The first part of Luke 16 (1-13) is our Gospel for today. The second part is the Gospel for next Sunday (Luke 16:19-31). So, today, I offer a sermon entitled: "Jesus On How To Launder Dirty Money - Part I". Next Sunday, "Jesus On How To Launder Dirty Money - Part II."

First, though, let's define terms.

Jesus teaches throughout the Gospels that all that we have belongs to God. God owns everything. All money belongs to God. Therefore, money that is not used as God would have it used is dirty. Today's Gospel refers to it as wealth, meaning lots of money. (And yes, by world standards, each of us here has lots of money.)

The objective is to launder the money **to make it clean** by using it the way God wants it used. How do we do that? To answer that question, let's look at what Jesus says in today's Gospel, which, on the surface, is the most difficult New Testament passage to understand this side of Revelation.

Here is a quick summary of the parable: a rich man has a manager. The rich man gets a report that the manager is mismanaging his, the rich man's property, so that widespread waste is occurring. The rich man decides to fire the manager, but insists before doing so that the manager must give a final accounting. So the manager has a limited amount of time to get the books in the proper order before his last day comes. The manager decides to offer discounts to the rich man's creditors on their bills. When the rich man, the master, finds out about this, he commends the manager for his prudence. Then Jesus tells his disciples they should make friends for themselves by means of dishonest wealth, dirty money, so that when there is no more money ever, the doors of heaven will be opened for you.

This all sounds a little strange. Until you know some things about how business was done at the time of Jesus. When a wealthy property owner chose to do so, he could hire a manager and give him complete oversight of his property. The owner expected to see a return on the property. As long as he got the return he expected, the manager could markup bills in order to achieve his own income. So, if someone owed the owner 80 measures of wheat, the manager could mark it up to 100 and charge 100, in order to achieve his own 20% income. This means that what he does in giving the owner's creditors discounts was not illegal, but simply shrewd business dealings. The creditor gets a break, the owner gets what's his, and the manager has made friends who will be inclined to help him when he loses

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his job. Even though what the manager did was legal, the fact that his markups were greedy and exorbitant is what made him dishonest.

Jesus, though, is not commending dishonesty. He is telling us that all money belongs to God and we need to use it in the way God wants it used. Until we do that, the money we have is dirty. As we use it the way God wants it used, it becomes clean. Then, after we die (when all money fails), hopefully dying “broke for God”, we are received into heaven.

The question then is: O.K., Jesus tells us to use dirty money the way God wants it used; but beyond this general statement, how are we to do it? Jesus shows us how to do it in the last half of Luke 16 in the Parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus, the Gospel for next Sunday.

Now, without actually delving into next week’s Gospel, how does one go about using dirty money? How does a Christian go about using dirty money and at the same time, please God? The answer is this: the way you please God is by using dirty money ... to give generously and excessively to the poor, the hungry, the starving and the homeless of the world. You want to make friends with God? You want to please God? One way that you do it is with the right use of your money. The right use of money, according to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, is to help the poor, the hungry, and the starving. That is the way that you make friends with God and please God ....

“You lay up for yourself treasures in heaven by sharing with the poor and the oppressed. You lay up treasures for yourself on earth by hoarding and spending your income on yourself.”<sup>1</sup>

Our Lord Jesus Christ calls out to us in today’s Gospel and invites us to be more faithful in using the excess wealth we have. Or dirty money. Money that we are entrusted with, in excess of what our basic needs for survival are. Jesus calls out to us and asks us to be faithful in serving God. He reminds us that we cannot serve God and dirty money. The objective is to clean the money, launder it, by using it as God intended. In Luke’s Gospel, to repeat, it means helping the poor, the hungry, the starving.

When is the last time you gave any serious thought to how you are using your money and your time and your talents for God?

We are about ready here at Hill Avenue Grace to go into the stewardship season. During this time throughout the ELCA, congregations like Hill Avenue Grace engage in Bible study, in prayer, in reflection and in conversation regarding who God is, who we are, what God’s will is for us and our world and the road map Jesus gives for our journey home.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward F. Marquart

[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_c\\_money\\_and\\_wise\\_investments\\_for\\_the\\_future.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_c_money_and_wise_investments_for_the_future.htm)

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Now, as I close this sermon, let me show you what Christian stewardship looks like. It's an anonymous story entitled "The Rich Family in Our Church". The complete story is too long to tell in the time available, so here is a summary.

### **The Rich Family In our Church – Summary**

What defines whether you serve God or money?

Back in 1946, a young girl named Eddy learned the true answer to that question. She came from a monetarily-dirt-poor poor family, as her father had passed away and left her mother with three young girls to raise, with no money.

One day her church announced that they would be collecting money for a poor family. Eddy and her family thought of ways to try and save up just a little bit of money, anything they could do. They ate potatoes for a month, made potholders to sell, tried to reduce their electricity...and in the end they saved up \$70 to donate to the poor family.

The only thing was, of course, that unbeknownst to them, Eddy's family was the poor family. After the collection at church, the pastor came to Eddy's house and delivered to her family the envelope containing their \$70, and another \$17 from the rest of the congregation. Eddy and her family were shocked. They had never thought of themselves as poor!

In the end, Eddy's family ended up donating the money to the church for a visiting missionary who was building churches in Africa. When the missionary saw the money the church collected, he exclaimed, "You must have some rich people in this church!" It was then that Eddy's family realized the true nature of wealth, that richness comes from within, not from your bank account.

You cannot serve God and money!

Thus ends Part 1 – Jesus On How To Launder Dirty Money. Come next week for Part II.

Amen.

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