

Title: The 3-D's
Text: Luke 16.14-17
Theme: False belief is damning
Series: Luke
Aim: I aim to call my congregation to love Christ above all and trust in him to justify them and not themselves.

On Sundays, we have been going through the gospel of Luke who was a first-generation follower of Christ and spent time with the apostles. He wrote this account, based on eyewitnesses to provide evidence to corroborate and support the growing influence and reach of the early church. This has been a fascinating study and shortly, we are going to be neck-deep into the final week of the life of Christ before his death on the cross. So, while this has been so good for our souls, we all need to buckle-up because things are going to get intense and even more personal. But this is exactly what is good for our souls as we will see from this text.

Read Text:

The Pharisees were spiritual rulers in Israel. They defined Judaism and they defended and enforced what they defined. They claimed to be the inheritors and keepers of God's law and they knew its content, but they misinterpreted its meaning and the results were damning. They could trace their history back to Moses in time, but they were way off the path of faithfulness. The Pharisees represent the majority of people in our world, that is, they are people who are relying on something, other than Christ in order to be validated and justified. In their case, they loved money and used (abused) Judaism as a cloak to cover-up their true love, which was money. Why are they in constant conflict with Jesus and why does Jesus call them out? What they are saying is wrong! They claim to be authorities of the Scriptures but they are misrepresenting. What they are saying and how they are living is NOT what God intended, ever! I want you to see that when you try to justify yourself, you live in unsatisfied bondage and fear, but when you embrace Christ, you are free to enjoy grace. When we read v.14, we almost choke. But v.14 is tied to v.15. V.14 is the fruit. V.15 is the root. Let's start with the symptoms (v.14) and then go to the diagnoses in v.15.

1. **The Symptoms** (14)

What is more dangerous? Poison that is marked as poison, or a caramel mocha latte laced with arsenic? Technically, if you straight up drank the poison, it would have a higher concentration of lethality than a latte that is laced with it. However, we would consider the latte to be more dangerous because it would appear to be something good when in reality it was lethal, while the poison that was marked as poison was obvious.

The Pharisees were like the caramel mocha latte laced with arsenic. They appeared to be the formal religious authority that represented God but in reality, they were going to hell and were leading people into it. It is obvious that Jesus reserves his harshest and strongest words to the "religious" leaders. This is not because they were religious, it is because they used religion as a

cloak for godlessness. They didn't love God. They loved themselves and therefore, hated God. Look at the end of v.14. *"They ridiculed him."* Ridiculing God is the symptom of a severely disordered heart and life. They heard Jesus teaching and they ridiculed him. Like the juvenile kids in the back row of the class, they were mocking the teacher, but this teacher was God! V.14 says, they *"heard all these things."* What were those things? It was the story that Jesus told in verses 1-13 of the dishonest steward. Remember last week? Johnny pointed out 1) we are managers of what God has entrusted to us, not actual owners. Our money is his money that we are stewards of and we will give an account of how we used it. 2) God's kingdom is the only investment that will bring the joy of eternal friendship. I was thinking about this last week while Johnny was preaching because we observed the Lord's table following the sermon. The Lord's Table was instituted by Christ for the church as a visible ordinance for us to observe until he comes. It is very important because it is a celebration, remembrance and reaffirmation of the New Covenant. When Jesus instituted the New Covenant, he did it at a meal with his friends. During that meal Jesus said to them, *"No longer do I call you servants...but I have called you friends."* The New Covenant is all about our relationship to God and to one another. The gospel is personal. Jesus gives us resources in order to invest in the joy of eternal friendship. Use what you have to influence people for the gospel. This will bring you incredible joy. Jesus is telling you this because he wants your joy to abound. He is counseling us to make investments that will last forever. Jesus is the good King. Jesus is perfectly good and perfectly wise. He knows best. There are people who hoard money in order to secure their happiness and it betrays them. There are other people who are generous with their lives (including their money) and it comes back to them a hundred-fold! Here is our good king giving us good counsel in order to enlarge our hearts for him and others. 3) What you do with your money reveals what is in your heart and 4) Your heart only has the capacity for one dominating love. (read v.13) This is good stuff Jesus is telling us and what do the Pharisees do? They hear it and they mock him! They act like Jesus is an idiot. You cannot serve God and money. When we serve money, we try to use God to get money. That is the heresy of the prosperity gospel. But when we love God, we use money to help others love God. The Pharisees were lovers of money. So, what does that mean? They were not serving God! They were using God to serve themselves. They were using their religious words and position to pursue their greed and power. God is not a means to money so you can safeguard your happiness and significance. God is the treasure. All other treasures cannot save you. The words of Jesus are the words of God and like a two-edged sword, they cut and they expose. Jesus tells them what is going on in their hearts.

2. The Diagnosis (15a)

"You are those who justify yourselves before men." You are those who try to validate yourself in front of others. You are looking to be affirmed by the approval of others. This goes right to the core. Jesus reveals what I call the 3-D's. There are two types of people in this world. Those who are justified by Christ and those who are not. Those who are not, try to find their justification (or validation) elsewhere. Now, to be clear, those of you who have come to faith in Christ, still struggle with this. In fact, growing as a follower of Christ, is, to a large extent learning to embrace, enjoy and depend on the justification of Christ and not look to myself or others for justification or validation.

The 3-D's are how we try to justify ourselves. (define, depend, defend) 1) We define ourselves in ways we think will be acceptable, impressive, maybe shocking to our world. Then we 2) depend on that definition for our meaning, hope, happiness, purpose and significance. Because we dump the weight of our personal significance on that definition, we have to 3) defend our definition when it is threatened.

The whole thing can be a cover-up for a deeper issue, as is the case here. The Pharisees defined themselves as the spiritual rulers of Israel. They depended on that reputation for significance and became so threatened by Christ who exposed them, that they had him crucified. Here Jesus exposes that. Their religious position was simply a cover-up, a means for validation and a quest for money and of course power. People don't love money just to have money. They love money because of what they think they can get from the money, whether it be respect, influence, comfort, power or sex.

We all have things that we are tempted to look to in order to define us and we are all tempted to define ourselves with something that is respectable and acceptable, but is nothing more than an idol, a trust for our meaning, hope, happiness, purpose and significance.

Let's say that you are a cheerleader coach and you have to pick who is going to make the squad and who is going to be captain. You only have 8 positions open and you have 20 girls who tryout. You have to cut 12 of them. Some of them, and one in particular has a mom who has for years, defined herself as the mother of a cheerleader. She has sent her daughter to all the classes and camps and has the stickers and decals on the back of her SUV. She thinks that being in the stands with the other moms of cheerleaders, at the games is the pinnacle of significance, being accepted, admired and envied. Her worth, meaning, hope, happiness, purpose and significance is now completely dependent on her daughter making this squad. In her mind, your job is not to pick the 8 best cheerleaders, your job is to justify her as a person by picking her daughter that she is trusting in for her significance. If you don't pick her daughter, you know the consequences will be massive. (defending her daughter is really defending herself)

This mom was looking to her daughter to justify her. The Pharisees were looking to reputation, influence as a means to wealth to justify them. What are you tempted to look to in order to define you? The things that we get anxious about, reveal what we are tempted to trust in. Fill in the blank. I cannot rest until _____. I cannot sit down until _____. I am not at peace unless _____. We are tempted to use the gifts that God gives us to make much of us, instead of making much of him. You may be gifted musically, athletically, academically or socially. You are known as a gifted singer, basketball player, student, business owner, teacher, or pastor/elder. God has given you that to make much of him. If I have to make sure that you know my statistics, my credentials, my resume, my impact, my experiences, my successes, the who's who that I know, then, what am I doing? I am trying to justify myself. I am looking to your approval of me as the source of my validation and significance. And you know what? Seeking the validation of others will never be enough. It is like drinking salt water. You will only want more. But the worst thing about trusting the gifts instead of the giver, is that they cannot save you. To all those who are

trying to justify themselves before men, God knows the heart. He knows when, like the Pharisees you try to disguise an idol behind something respectable. He also knows that *“what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”*

3. **The Prognosis** (15b-c)

What is exalted among men? Obviously, it is the love of money, or looking to anything else other than Christ for your justification. We are impressed with achievements that make much of us, but anything that we use to define us, and depend on for our validation is an abomination in the sight of God. In other words, it is disgusting, revolting, detestable, to God. Depending on anything or anyone other than Christ for your salvation, your hope, your validation, your meaning, and identity will betray you and damn you. This is not unique to a religious setting, but it is particularly tempting in one. We have titles, like bishop, pastor, elder, teacher, professor, senior pastor, the list goes on. The titles are terms of office, and in some settings, rankings of authority and influence. The title carries a measure of respect and people are tempted to pursue the titles in order to get the respect. Man, if I could just get into that group, make that list, serve in that way, be seen in that level, hang around those people, be friends with that author or speaker, or as the Pharisees, have this much money to prove that I have arrived... When you do that, you are trying to justify yourself. You are trying to use the opinions of others as your validation. Jesus is very clear. Jesus is shockingly clear. *“what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”* It won't save you. And when God sees us doing this, he wants to throw up. But there is a cure.

4. **The Cure** (16-17)

Jesus packs a lot into these two verses (16-17). The Law and the Prophets refers to the Old Testament. The era of the OT has come to an end with John the Baptist. This does not mean that the OT is irrelevant, oh no! Look at v.17. The OT is hugely important. The OT was the Bible of Jesus and the NT is his commentary on it. But the OT was going somewhere. It was pointing to something bigger and better than itself. The OT was pointing to and was fulfilled in Christ. The era ended with John who pointed to Christ. *“since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached.”* That is referring to Christ. Since then, Christ, the King is here and he has been preaching about the kingdom of God, which is what the OT points to. What is the good news (gospel) of the kingdom? The kingdom is the reign of Christ (the King) with his people. The kingdom is a king, a people and a place. And the good news is that The King has come and has come to save us for and to an eternal kingdom, where we will live with him and enjoy him and where we will live with one another and enjoy one another forever.

I can think of 3 reasons why Jesus said this: 1) To point out that the Pharisees misunderstood the meaning and purpose of the Law. Jesus was the point of the Law. 2) To point out that the Law was not the end, but Christ and his kingdom is the telos (goal). 3) The Pharisees not only misinterpreted the law, but they used it as a means to make much of themselves instead of making much of God and others. How did Jesus summarize the law? Love God and love others!

I plan to expand on this a bit more next week, but I want you to see how the gospel that Jesus preached and accomplished is so much better than what the Pharisees offered. The Pharisees used religion, even the Law as a cloak to disguise their true motivation, which was money, power and esteem. They were trying to justify themselves. What do you know about people who love money and/or people who are constantly trying to justify themselves? They are never satisfied! They are never able to rest. They are anxious, fretful, frustrated, feel like they are in competition with others, threatened by others, and are not comfortable in their own skin. You really do not know where you stand with them because you get the sense that their relationship is based on what they think you can do for them, versus just because they like you. These Pharisees were backstabbers and would discard you in an instant, if you didn't keep to their code. They lived in fear of rejection and in turn treated others the same.

Jesus comes along to show, in part, that they didn't understand the Law that they read. They never understood the heart of God. What is a covenant? A covenant is a binding arrangement based on sacrifice where two parties become one family. Jesus tells his disciples in the Upper Room that he is establishing now the NEW COVENANT with them (and his people). Like the covenant of marriage where a man and a woman bind themselves to one another to form a new family, Jesus binds himself, based on his death to his beloved people, his bride in order to be a forever family. In this family we all share in the infinite love, life, provisions, joy and benefits of our Father. This is the whole point of life. People who are followers of Christ are not in competition with others, we are family. We are not trying to one up each other because we are trying to justify ourselves. Oh no! When we trust in Christ, we are justified by his grace. We have nothing to brag about anyway.

What was the point of the parable of the unjust steward? Use the temporal money/resources that God has given you for eternal purposes. What is eternal? The kingdom of God. Money does not last, the gospel does. Money does not last, people do, the forever family of God does. Stuff does not last, souls do.

Next week we are going to look at v.18. This is not a random statement about divorce and remarriage. This is directly related to this theme of loving God and others. In two weeks, we are going to tackle the sobering account of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus. The rich man was exactly what the Pharisees aspired to be. But he utterly failed to care of someone in his own sphere of influence. He treated his wealth, which betrayed him and failed him as being more important than someone like the beggar Lazarus.

Obviously, we each have to think about this on a personal level. Am I generous with what God has given me in order to advance the influence of the gospel? But we need to think about this on a church-wide level also. Our building is a resource that God has provided. The amount of usage this building endures is massive and it shows. Keeping the carpet fresh, walls painted, things maintained is never-ending. Why do we allow so many people to use our building? Because people last, not this building. Use money (or other things) for self, or to help others come to Christ? Look at what Jesus did with his riches, position, authority and power. He leveraged it for you.