

Stampede for Glory

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 16. We're going to continue on from where we left off following the parable of the unjust steward. As a matter of fact, our text this morning is actually a bridge between the parable of the unjust steward and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. We already learned that [Luke] 16 has all [these] little money issues [in it]. Our text mentions money this morning, but just as a side note. [In later sermons] we'll see how it becomes the bridge that leads into the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

If you remember, right before we g[e]t to this passage, Jesus is talking about the application of the parable of the unrighteous steward. In [Luke 16:]9, He says we need to be making friends for ourselves by this "unrighteous wealth," which is just whatever God has given us. We need to use it to evangelize the lost [and] to equip the saints [in] the work of the ministry. In other words, [we are] to invest in kingdom purposes—eternity—rather than sitting around buying more worldly stuff for ourselves and indulging in this world and not being rich toward God. That's what Jesus said. He [said], in the immediate context of our passage, that you can't serve God and wealth—you can't give equal devotion to God and wealth. One of them is going to take priority. One of them is going to master your life, [and] it's either going to be God or it's going to be your money, but it can't be both. That is the context of [what] we're going to be looking at this morning.

Let's say [that] you work in a big warehouse, and there are a lot of flammable liquids, materials, and all sorts of things. Let's say that as you're working in this warehouse, you are there one day, and somebody [using] a forklift knocks over some barrels of flammable liquid. They burst open, catch fire, and this big river of fire flows down one side of the building, blocking all the escapes. Things are exploding and catching fire. Everybody is scared, and they kind of huddle into a corner.

As you're huddling there, you hear the fire engines coming. Even though the sprinkler systems are going, it seems to [be making the fire from the liquids] worse. You're choking on the acrid smoke. Your life is in peril. [Then] you hear some hacking and pounding, and axe blades start to come through the wall. Soon you realize [that] the firemen are ripping a hole in the wall so you can escape. They chop through the wall, and say, "Come out this way!"

The owner of the company is there, and he says, "I'm not leaving. All of my stuff is here. This is my company." The manager, assistant manager, and the foreman, say, "Yeah, these are our products. We can't leav[e] them."

What would you think about that? You want to just think, "Well, the smoke must have got[ten] to their heads." You want to knock them out and drag them out anyway, [saying], "You're coming!" It would be absurd to stay there in that perilous place and not flee for your life.

This is exactly what is happening in our text. Jesus has talked about this unrighteous steward [and] applied [the concept of the] text. He is speaking to His disciples about how they need to use the resources God has given to them for kingdom purposes. He's making sure that they are going to do this. Then comes our text. Follow along as I read Luke 16:14–17. [It] says:

Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. The Law

and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.

From this text you are going to learn four facts about men, about God, and about His law, which will enable you to avoid certain errors, believe certain truths, and escape certain judgment.

The first [fact] is this: Lovers of money often scoff at those who are generous. Look at [Luke 16:]14. It says: “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.” Literally the text says, “They were turning up their noses,” like, “Huh!” Jesus had just said, “Use your resources to win people to Christ. You can’t worship God and money [see Luke 16:13], you’ve got to worship God and then use your resources, which God has given, for His glory,” and they were [saying], “Huh,” scoffing. Why? [It is] because they were lovers of money. They had this weird retribution/financial theology thing going on, which went like this: “If you have a lot of money, then God must like you. If God is the one who gives money, [who] gives us all that we have, [and] you’re rich, then God must really love you because He is blessing you with so much money.” You could see how somebody might arrive at that. “Therefore,” [they thought], “since God has given [us] so much money, therefore, [we are] well-liked by God and [our] entrance into [the] kingdom is sure.”

They looked at those who were poor, sick, [or] afflicted, and they thought to themselves, “Those people are obviously cursed by God, otherwise they wouldn’t be poor, suffering, sick, [or] afflicted.” [The religious leaders] had this weird thought that their money was an assurance of God’s favor toward them. It encouraged them [and] was a visual proof to other people that God surely was in favor of them because look how much money they had.

So, because of that, they made God a second priority in their [lives], and put money first. They pursued money. They thought of money. They acquired money, and they scoffed at Jesus when Jesus said [they] couldn't serve God and wealth. They're really like many in the church today who serve the god of money. There are many who call themselves Christians [who] have great resources but [who] give very little. Many are quick to accumulate wealth, but slow to give it away to kingdom purposes. They think, "Well, I know that I have this great wealth, but I'll give a little bit, [which is] probably the average," they think to themselves, "[of] what other people are giving," and that's how they make themselves feel good. But really, we deceive ourselves when we think that what we have is ours. We dealt with this in weeks past. It is not ours. We are stewards of it, and the question is: What kind of steward[s] are we? Are we investing God's stuff, God's money, God's life that He has given us for His glory, or [are we] just indulg[ing] in the things of the world?

Paul knew about this. Paul knew, because he was an ex-Pharisee, what it meant to be a lover of money. This is what he says in 1 Timothy 6:9–10, as he is writing to Timothy in the church there at Ephesus. Listen to the graphic description he gives here. He says: "But those who want to get rich," now can you think of anybody who might want to get rich? I've heard of people back East, there's a small group. . . . The fact is, if you asked many Christians, "Do you want to get rich?" they would say, "Yes!" But listen to what Paul says: "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation." They aren't content. They want more. They think that money is going to make them happy, and we know that there are very poor people who are happy, and very rich people who are miserable.

Money is neither good nor bad, but the love of money is certainly bad, and fixing our hope on the uncertainty of money is certainly bad. We see this in our economy today, as those who thought, "Well, I'm going to retire soon. I've accumulated this much money in my mutual funds, which have now plummeted to below half of what they were," [are now] scared. Why are they scared? [They're scared] because they've set their hope on what?

[They have set their hopes on] “the uncertainty of riches” [1 Timothy 6:17]. This is the kind of thing [Paul] is talking about. “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare” [1 Timothy 6:9]. The whole point is [that it is] like the love of money is this big pit and they’re walking along and they fall into it. Not only do they fall into the pit, [but] there’s a snare waiting for them when they get to the bottom. They fall into temptation and a snare “and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction” [1 Timothy 6:9]. [Paul] describes it as like falling [off] of this precipice, this desire of wanting to get rich.

He says, “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil” [1 Timothy 6:10]. One time I was quoting this and I purposely just said “the root of all evil.” I had probably six people come up to me after the service, and say, “Hey, hey, hey, [that verse says], ‘all sorts of evil.’”

I said, “Oh, really? You’ve looked at the Greek, huh?” The Greek literally reads: “It is the root of all that is evil.” You can interpret it how you want, but that’s what it says. “And some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves,” or impaled themselves, “with many griefs” [1 Timothy 6:10]. It’s as if there’s a pit, and you fall into the pit, and the pit has a snare at the bottom, and after it catches you, you fall on the spikes. It’s about as [bad] as you can get. This is where the Pharisees were. They were lovers of money. They had fallen into that pit. They had caught themselves in that snare. They were impaled “with many griefs.”

When Jesus spoke of the proper use of money, that one cannot serve God and money, the Pharisees were just run through with conviction. And so, like always, when people are really convicted, they do one of two things. They either humble themselves and repent, or they turn on the preacher. “Oh! That preacher. He’s always preaching about money. He’s always begging for money.” Some [preachers] do, granted. If [the people who have been convicted] can’t [blame the preacher], then they try to douse their consciences in a different way, [thinking], “Surely there are other people here with more money than me. I mean, God actually doesn’t want *me* to give because I don’t have very much money. I’ll let richer people give.” That’s

one thing. What about the richer people? The richer people say, “Well, I’ve got a lot of money, but other people can give. The poor people can give.” Then there [are] other people, who say, “Well, I’ll be a great giver in the future when I make my fortune and I have this huge self-generating income. Then, I’ll wake up one morning, throw away my idol of greed, and then I’ll start worshipping God, automatically.” Then other people think, “Well, you know, I don’t really want to give [to] God and honor Him with what I have. So, I’ll just put a little bit in the plate—a buck a week. That way at least I’m giving something.” Then they massage their conscience[s] that way.

These different sorts of attitudes [reveal] the love of money, and an unwillingness to really honor God with your wealth. You’re really [saying], “God, I love You, but not as much as my stuff. Do I have to let it go?” Do you remember what Jesus said at the end of Luke 14? “You need to be willing to give up all, take up your cross and follow Me” [see Luke 14:27]. We are accountable to God, not men, and what matters is not what others give. If you’re sitting out there and the offering plate comes along and all you’re thinking about is other people, your heart is not right within you. You should be thinking, “God, what have You given me? What should I give to You?” Actually, you should think about it before you even come [to church] so that when you come, you can just offer it up cheerfully, faithfully, regularly, not under compulsion, with a cheerful heart, anonymously so that no one knows, [keeping it] between you and God. Giving is between you and God; it is not about another person. But, of course, when Jesus talked like this, the Pharisees didn’t like it. Be warned: You can sink a boat with water, and you can sink a boat with gold bricks. Either way is bad.

[The] second [fact is]: Religious hypocrites fool men, but not God. Look at [Luke 16:]15: “And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men.’” Just stop there. The Pharisees fancied themselves as being in God’s good graces because they had a lot of money and [because] they were *externally* obeying a lot of the laws. But let me ask you: Was their hope of salvation in Jesus? No. [Was] there a deep love of God? No. [Was their hope in] their promise of the coming Messiah? No.

What were they trusting in? Themselves. They trusted in their works. They trusted in their external observance of the Law. They had everybody else fooled, so they thought, “Well, obviously we’re righteous because everybody *thinks* we’re righteous.” But the person [who] matters is [whom]? God [matters most], not men. There is no doubt that you can fool men. I’ve seen people be like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—when they’re here [at church] they’re one thing and when they’re gone they’re another. [Then] they come into [my] office and they tell [me] what they’re really like the rest of the time. It’s pretty scary.

But let’s not miss the lesson here in the beginning of [Luke 16:]15 that there are those who, like the Pharisees, look down on other people because it makes them feel righteous. This is where the Pharisees were. If you’ve come to church for a long time, you’ve kind of learned the system, the jargon, and the motions, you can kind of start looking down at other people. “Come on. Look at that guy. Look at that gal. [He isn’t] doing this, but I am. I’m serving here, but [he isn’t].” We start comparing [ourselves] with other people because why? [We do this] because when we find other people who we assume are less godly, it makes us feel what? [It makes us feel] more righteous. But that’s not what God wants us to do. What God wants us to do is not compare ourselves with men, but with Jesus Christ—the perfectly holy Son of God. As soon as we do that, the balances immediately shift, peg out, and we see how low we are and how exalted Christ is.

We find [examples of this] in the Scriptures, [with people] saying things like, “Well, I’m glad I’m not like that tax collector over there, who is weeping and pounding his breast” [see Luke 18:13]. Or, “Look at that widow who is throwing in her two little microscopic mites [see Luke 21:1–4], but I am going to [give much more],” and of course, they take all their money and convert it into small coins so they can stand there and make a lot of clinking [sounds] as they dump it in. Everybody [there thinks], “Man, that guy’s going for a long time—[he must be giving a lot].” Well, they don’t know he’s dumping in pennies.

The cure for comparing yourself [to other people] is to look to Jesus. That's why Jesus says what He does. If you look at the middle of [Luke 16:]15: "But God knows your hearts." See, that is the great leveler, right? If you fall into [the mindset of], "Well, I'm better than you are," then you just think of God and then, how are you doing in comparison with God, who is the standard?

One time I was preaching at a university and they asked me to preach on the end of the world. So, I preached on the end of the world, and somebody after the class asked me, "So, are you telling me that Mother Theresa, Gandhi, and other good people like that are going to hell?"

I said, "Well, I'm just telling you that if we compare ourselves with them, they're pretty good, aren't they? They really devoted their [lives] to the cause, right?"

[The student said], "Yeah."

I said, "Well, how do they compare with an infinitely holy God?" The guy was silent. God is the standard, not other people. We can always find somebody else, some other axe murderer, and [think], "Well, I'm looking pretty good compared to that guy. Look what that guy in the paper [did]. I'm better than that." Yeah, but the problem is [that] *God* is the standard, not the axe murderer. God knows our hearts. God sees everything. Think about that. You're transparent to God. He sees everything. You think some [unholy] thoughts; God sees it. You lust; God sees it. You covet; God sees it. You have any sort of wicked imaginations; God sees it. God sees everything. Do you remember what the Lord told Samuel the prophet concerning King Saul? He said this in 1 Samuel 16:7: "For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." The Pharisees had all men fooled. Men thought [the Pharisees] were righteous because they were looking at the externals. God saw their heart[s], and He said, "It's detestable" [see Luke 16:15].

David told Solomon in 1 Chronicles 28:9: "For the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts." That's kind of scary, isn't it? Sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking, "Well, I'm here and

nobody is around, [so] I'm just going to indulge in some wicked thoughts." God is watching. He is listening. He knows everything. [It's like] everything you think is printed out on a sheet and put before Him on His desk. He sees everything. He knows everything. This goes a long way in curbing wickedness. As the author of Hebrews says in [Hebrews] 4:13: "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." God sees all. We may fool people, but we're not fooling God. The Pharisees were fooling people, but they were not fooling God, Jesus says.

Jesus, speaking to the church of Thyatira, pronounces judgment on the false teacher he names Jezebel, along with her disciples, and says this in Revelation 2:23: "I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds." God searches minds and hearts; He sees right through us. We're transparent. If you're honest with yourself before an all-seeing God, you know there's plenty of wicked[ness] in your heart. You may be pretty cleaned up on the outside, but if you're honest with yourself, you know your heart is "desperately sick and deceitful above all else" [see Jeremiah 17:9], that all day long we have selfish, angry, lustful, greedy, and covetous thoughts. Whatever it is, I mean, we're just full of it, aren't we?

You may think to yourself, "Well, Jack, if that's the case, then it seems like there's nothing we can do." That is the exact point [at which] Jesus is getting. [When] we come to God, we don't come to [Him], and say, "Lord, look at my money; let me in. Look at my self-righteousness; let me in. Look at my church attendance, my Bible reading; let me in." No, we do those things because we love God. We don't do those things so God will love us, so God will save us. We must bow before the King of righteousness, saying:

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.

Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless come to Thee for grace.
Foul, I to the fountain fly.
Wash me, Savior, or I die.¹

That's how God wants it. That's probably the best verse in all of hymnody, from "Rock of Ages." It talks about our utter helplessness and our utter inability to approach God. But you know what? Almost all hymnals, including our own, leave out that stanza. Why? [It is] because it talks about how helpless we are, and people [think], "We don't want to put that one in there. I mean, you know, we're *kind of* good." No. No, we bring nothing to the table when it comes to our salvation. We must cling to the cross of Christ. We're helpless. We look to God for grace. Though we may see ourselves as pretty good compared to others, when we compare ourselves with God we are foul and so we fly to that fountain, which William Cowper wrote, is:

... filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.²

We run to Christ because it is His blood, His sacrifice, that cleanses us and makes us righteous before God, not ourselves. There are many professing Christians today who have convinced themselves that they are worshipping God because they feel good about themselves. Well, that's not an indicator. They say, "Well, I'm doing a lot of things." That doesn't mean your

¹Augustus M. Toplady, "Rock of Ages," *Voices in Worship* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 2003), #275.

²William Cowper, "There Is a Fountain," *Voices in Worship* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 2003), #151.

worship is acceptable. It must be in spirit that is from the heart and truth according to God's Word: both—not one, not the other, but both. Great intentions from the heart [and] disobedience to God's Word is unacceptable. Obedience to God's Word [and] bad intentions of the heart [is] unacceptable. You have to have both of them. You come to Jesus because He is “the way, the truth, and the life, and no one gets to the Father but through Him” [see John 14:6]. There is no other way and you can't get there through your righteousness.

Maybe you're thinking to yourself, “But, Jack, listen. I don't know how to get to that place. I know I'm a sinner. I know that Jesus is the Savior, but I just can't leave my sin. I won't leave my sin. In my mind I want to leave my sin, but I keep going back to it. I'm enslaved to it, and I just can't get the power or whatever it is to save myself, or have God save me. I don't know what to do.” That brings us to our third [fact]: Be of good courage, there is hope. Look at [Luke 16:]16, where Jesus goes on to say: “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John.” You're thinking, “Well, why is that a hope?”

Now, remember, [Jesus] is speaking to the Pharisees who have scoffed at Him because of His teaching about the use of money and putting God before money. If we looked at this [verse] just divorced from its context, we would say, “Well, yeah, the Law and the Prophets—the Old Testament—was written and then John the Baptist came. OK, that's easy.” Well, what is Jesus saying here? What Jesus is saying here is [that] the Law and the Prophets came before John and what did they proclaim? [They proclaimed] the coming Messiah and the forerunner to the coming Messiah. Do you remember what Jesus said in John 5:39? He said to the religious leaders: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about” what? “Me.” “They bear witness of Me.” He went on to say in John 5:46: “For if you believed Moses,” who wrote the Law, “You would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.” So, Moses writes all these predictions of the coming Messiah so that when the Messiah would come, people would what? Receive Him. Hello?

If I wrote a letter to you that said, “I’m stopping by your house on this night for fifteen minutes, please be there,” and then I show up, and you [say], “What are you doing here?”

“Well, I did write you a note.”

“Yes.”

“And you did read it?”

“Yes.”

“And it did say I was coming tonight?”

“Yes.”

“I’m here.”

“So, why are you here?”

Does that not work? That’s what’s happening [in our text]. The Old Testament says, “Here’s the Messiah. This is who He is. This is where He comes from. This is where He’s born. This is where His tribe is. [These are] the circumstances.” [There are] all these prophecies about Jesus’ birth and His coming, and then Jesus comes, fulfills all of those prophecies, and what do [the religious leaders] do? [They say], “What are you doing here? We aren’t following You!” Do you see how utterly blind they were?

Our text literally reads, “The Law and Prophets until John.” The word “proclaimed” as the New American Standard and the NIV have it, is supplied by the end of the verse, which says, “Since that time, the gospel of the kingdom has been,” or “is,” “preached.” What’s being contrasted is there’s something that was preached before John and something that was preached after John and so “were” or “were proclaimed” is usually inserted there. But [text verse] literally reads: “The Law and the Prophets until John and since that time the gospel of the kingdom is preached.” So, in other words, you got preached to you the Law and the Prophets until John, which said the Messiah was coming and said the forerunner was coming, and you know that.

Now we’re going to take a little fun rabbit trail. This is really cool. So, you’re going to have to keep a finger, a ribbon, a piece of paper, or whatever in Luke 16, and then I want you to turn to Matthew 11. We’re going to be

kind of going back and forth here a little bit, and even in another text, so we're going to get very dexterous, or whatever you want to call it. This [section in Matthew] is not a parallel text, but it's a similar text [in which] Jesus speaks about the same subject matter in a very similar context. It helps us understand our text better, so I want to point this out to you.

Look at Matthew 11:7: "As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John," this is John the Baptist, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" In other words, did you see a stick in the wilderness? No, man, John was out there; people were walking down the road to Jericho and he was at the Jordan, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" They thought, "Let's go see this guy." So, they were turning to go see him because he wasn't just some little stick by the river, man, this guy was throwing down.

[Jesus] says [in Matthew 11:8]: "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing?" No. John wore coarse camel hair. I mean, the guy ate bugs. He says [in Matthew 11:8–9], "Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet." But why is he more than a prophet? [Matthew 11:]10 [says]: "This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'" What does that mean? He's not only the prophet, but he's the prophet who is the forerunner of the Messiah. [Jesus] quotes what? [He quotes] Malachi 3:1. Now, [keep a] finger [in] Luke, [and a] finger [in] Matthew, [and turn] back to Malachi. Malachi is the book right before Matthew. Just go right there—it's one of those small, little ancient minor prophets that are sometimes hard to find. [Malachi] 3:1—Jesus quoted this. Let me quote the whole verse:

"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant,

in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts.

Here, [Malachi] says there is going to be a messenger and all of a sudden the Lord is going to appear in His temple to His people. The Lord is going to show up. So, we know that there is a messenger, and we know the Lord follows the messenger. So, after he gives that little bit of information, then he goes down in Malachi 3 and he rebukes them for some various sins they were in. At the end of [Malachi] 3 he encourages those who fear the Lord that they will not be forgotten, and in [Malachi] 4, [he] predicts more judgment. Then look at the last two verses of the Old Testament. This is the last book of the Old Testament ever written and the last two verses in the Old Testament. Notice what it says [in] Malachi 4:5–6, where we read this:

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

OK, we’re going to abandon Malachi. Stick with Matthew and Luke. Notice what Jesus says. Jesus quotes that [there would be a] herald who would precede the Messiah. [The messenger] is also spoken of in Isaiah 40[:3 as] a voice crying out in the wilderness. So here [in Luke 16:16], Jesus says [to the religious leaders], “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed, explaining that the Messiah would come [along with] His forerunner. You know this. You’re experts in the Law. You [have] the message: I’m coming. And guess what? John came. John came and I’ve come.” That’s what He’s pointing out here.

In Matthew 11:11, Jesus says that John the Baptist is the greatest person ever born of woman. Just making a statement like that is pretty amazing, right? When Jesus says that He’s obviously right because He is God. So,

[John the Baptist] is greater than Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Adam, Noah, Moses, and Daniel. There is nobody on earth born of woman [who] has ever been greater than John the Baptist. Then look at the end of [Matthew 11:]11: “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” It’s like, whoa. Do you see what Jesus is saying here? The lowliest sinner on earth—the most wretched, rebellious, sin-cursed person here on earth—who makes it into the kingdom of heaven will be greater than the greatest man who was ever born on earth.

Why does Jesus say that? He says this to make this one point: Make sure you get in. It doesn’t matter how great you are here on earth. I’m telling you, if you can get in the door, if you can get into the kingdom of heaven, everything will be great for all eternity. But if you don’t do that, it won’t be good for all eternity. You’ve got to get in. You’ve got to get in[to] the kingdom of heaven. Get saved. Get in the kingdom. But if you get in the kingdom of heaven—even if it’s by the skin of your teeth, even if it’s on your deathbed, even if you’re like the thief on the cross, “Lord, remember me,” and then [he] died [see Luke 23:42]—you’ll be greater as the lowest person in heaven than the greatest person who has ever lived on earth. That is amazing.

Look at Matthew 11:12: “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence.” Notice [that] He, too, uses this “from the days of John the Baptist until now,” this reference of time period. There is something happening before John. It is the exact same words He uses in our text [in Luke 16]. But He says “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence.” What is that? Well, if you remember, when John the Baptist came, he came preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand” [see Matthew 3:1–2], and what did they do to him? Oh, just cut off his head [see Matthew 14:1–12]. They killed him, right? They killed John for preaching the way of salvation to them.

Then Jesus came along and they tried to throw Him off a cliff [see Luke 4:29] and kill Him in many other different ways, and persecuted Him, and persecuted His disciples. Even though He was the Messiah, they persecuted

[Him], His disciples, and the messengers. The [people] rejected [Him], and said, “Oh, Jesus has a demon [see John 8:48–50]. Oh, Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners [see Matthew 9:9–13].” They were constantly rejecting [and] rejecting [Him].

The kingdom of heaven was suffering violence, but then Jesus makes this interesting little statement here. He says: “Violent men take it,” that is, the kingdom of heaven, “by force.” Now, that is an interesting statement. Who is taking heaven by force? Is it the religious leaders? Are the religious leaders trying to take heaven by force but they can’t? Or are there people actually taking it by force? That is the question, isn’t it? Then Jesus says in Matthew 11:13–15: “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.” Notice that “until John,” just like [in] our text, “And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Did you see that? Jesus quotes Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, which predicts the coming of the forerunner. He says, “You know the Law, you know the Prophets, you know the Messiah would come, and you know He would be predicted by the forerunner, and you know that’s the last thing mentioned in the Old Testament. So John, the forerunner, has come and I have come. You need to believe in Me. If John is the forerunner, who does that make Me? [It makes me] the Messiah.”

OK, we’re done with Matthew. Now go back to our text [in Luke 16]. Rabbit trail over. But I just wanted you to see that because it is going to help us understand our passage. Look at Luke 16:16 again, where Jesus says: “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John.” We’ve already explained what that meant. It means that they were constantly proclaiming the coming of the Messiah and His forerunner all the way up until the forerunner came. “Since that time,” since John the Baptist showed up, “the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.” [“Forcing his way into] what? [They are forcing their way into] the kingdom of heaven. [It is] almost the same exact [wording as what we found in Matthew]. As a matter of fact, do you see that word “forcing” there, where it says, “everyone is forcing his way into it” at the end of

[Luke 16:]16? That word “forcing” is the same word translated “violent” as in “violent men take it by force,” in Matthew 11:12.

What does that mean? Who is [“forcing his way into it”]? Well, there [are] basically three interpretations that I came across. I didn’t mention these [in] the first service, but since you guys are my friends, I’ll give you this extra data. No, actually, I had several people come up and ask me [at the end of the first service what the interpretations were], so I thought, “OK, I’ll tell you.” One [interpretation is that] demons are trying to take heaven by force, which, of course, is pretty novel, but there’s no mention of that at all in the context. So, that’s not it. [An]other is [that] the Pharisees were trying to force their way in. But that doesn’t work either. You say, “Well, why is that?” Well, because, when you think about it, were the Pharisees trying to enter in any differently before and after John? No. See, whatever this [forcing his way into it] is, [it had] happened since John. Since John came, people started to stampede for glory.

Do you remember what happened when John came, preaching by the Jordan, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” [Matthew 3:2]? Do you remember what happened? Let me just remind you. Matthew 3:5–6 [says]: “Then Jerusalem was going out to him.” Notice, *Jerusalem*—the whole city—“and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.” What is the picture here? [It is] a stampede. As soon as John [came], it was like [everyone said], “There’s a prophet. He’s down by the river. He’s preaching the gospel. He’s telling everybody to repent [because] the Messiah is coming. Let’s go!” and the whole group of them just went down there. The leaders went down there, not to get baptized, but to observe because they didn’t need to confess their sins. They were righteous, they thought.

But who was coming to Jesus? Turn back, as a reminder, to Luke 15:1: “Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.” Those people were coming. Those people saw their sins. They saw their wretchedness, immorality, deceit, lying, [and] treachery against God,

and they realized, “Man, we need God. We need God.” And so, they’re all piling in. That’s why when Jesus went [throughout the countryside preaching], those huge crowds were mobbing to get to Him. Why? [It is] because they saw their need, and they were pressing in.

What does this mean, this whole “forcing his way into it”? Think about it. Did Jesus ever use any sort of hyperbole to describe our entrance into the kingdom of heaven? “Strive to enter the narrow way” [see Luke 13:24]. “Gouge out your eye” [see Matthew 5:29]. “Cut off your hand” [see Matthew 5:30]. “Hate your father and mother” [see Luke 14:26]. “Give up all your possessions” [see Matthew 19:21]. “Pick up your cross—die to yourself—and follow Me” [see Matthew 16:24]. He says it [throughout] the context leading up [to this portion of Scripture], right? Who are these people who are offering what Thomas Watson calls “holy violence” to enter the kingdom of heaven? It’s those who see themselves as sinners. The word “violence” describes a desperation [as of] a person who is compelled. They’re terrified, they’re emotionally wound up, they’re [thinking], “Man, I’ve got to go!” like a person in a burning building who realizes, “Ah!” They’re clawing to get into the kingdom of heaven.

What’s strange is [that] the religious leaders, who should have known better, who had the Law, who had the Prophets, who knew the Law, who knew the Prophets, who had everything they needed to know Jesus was coming, when He came, they rejected Him and who was coming in? The tax collectors, sinners, immoral people, drunkards, [and] thieves [were the ones getting saved]. All of those people were [saying], “I need God! I need God!” and so, they were clawing their way in. The religious leaders [were saying], “Pssht! We don’t need that! We’re righteous.”

A lot of times [there is] confusion because we think to ourselves, “Well, if we’re supposed to strive, and the whole—even if it’s hyperbole—cutting off the hand, hating father and mother, dying to oneself, taking up one’s cross [thing], I mean, that seems like things that we have to *do*. Is that kind of like works salvation? It seems like it’s work salvation.” This is where a lot of people get confused because they see Jesus’ hard demands here. Even if

you say, “Well, I disagree with [the] interpretation [that the ones striving to get in are the tax collectors and sinners],” well then just go back a chapter. If that doesn’t work, go back to [Luke] 14, where it’s really scary. Jesus makes hard demands upon sinners. You say, “Well, is this teaching works salvation?” No. No, it is not.

God is sovereign in salvation, but a lot of people don’t understand how to meld the sovereignty of God [with their concept of salvation]. A lot of times [they] fall into two errors. One is to say we are totally in control of ourselves, we are the masters of our own destiny, we tell God, we make God choose us, we do this and God responds. [That is saying that] we’re sovereign over our own being, which is wrong. The other [error people make is]: God is completely sovereign, so sovereign you could just [lie] on the couch and He’d save you. You don’t need to hear anything; you don’t need to do anything. He’s just going to save you because He is absolutely sovereign.

Listen, [imagine] you were [going] to witness to somebody. You see somebody who needs Christ, you go up [to him], witness to him, and the person repents and believes in Christ. Do you go around [saying], “I saved somebody”? Would you say that? “I saved him”? No, you [would] say, “No, God saved him.” Well, now wait a second here, you shared the gospel with him. You opened your mouth. You’re the one who led him to Christ. Obviously, you saved him. No, no. God saved him. Or how about this? You know somebody who needs Christ, you begin to pray for him and pray for him. Then all of a sudden, one day you’re at work, and you get this phone call at lunchtime, and [that person] says, “You won’t believe this! I became a Christian,” and you throw up your hands, and say, “I saved him, Lord!” Is that what you say? Well, no, of course not. You say, “Praise God.” Why? [It is] because *He* saved him.

You say, “Well, so what does this mean?” It means this: God is absolutely sovereign, but He also uses means to accomplish His will. We are God’s instruments—His hammers, chisels, and saws—but God is the Great Carpenter who uses us. If you went into some master craftsman’s shop, and

you saw all this incredible furniture, you [wouldn't say], "Man, look at the furniture that those tools made!"

The guy would be insulted, "Hey, hey, hey! *I* made those, not the tools!"
"Well, didn't the tools do the work?"

"Yeah, but I was wielding them. I supplied the power behind them." That's how it is with God. He has means that He uses. He supplies the power, but He uses means, like prayer, like us sharing the gospel. It's not just [that] God is sovereign, it's [that] God is sovereign, and He uses means. So, when we read in the Scripture and we see things like Jesus making hard calls upon people, "force your way in," "strive to enter the narrow way," or things like that—"cut off your hand, gouge out your eye, you can't enter unless you give up everything, you can't enter the kingdom of heaven"—some people get confused. They think, "Well, that seems like a works thing." What if the young rich man [had] said, "OK, I'll give up all my possessions"? Would that have earned him his salvation? No. So then why did Jesus say it? Well, that was [for] a whole different reason. Jesus was trying to get him to realize that he had a love of money over the love of God and if he loved God more than money then he would have set aside his idol and trusted in God, which would have saved him [see Matthew 19:16–22]. God, though absolutely sovereign, has chosen to use "the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" [1 Corinthians 1:21].

There are some who we would describe as hyper-Calvinists, who would say, "Well, we don't need to pray." Why? "[We don't need to pray] because God is already going to do what He is going to do. We don't need to witness or send out missionaries because God already has chosen who He is going to save, and He's going to save them anyway. Nothing can thwart Him. He is absolutely sovereign." The problem is [that] that's wrong. That is an error. That is to become unbalanced. That is to pit the sovereignty of God over the means of God instead of taking them together. We call sinners to repentance, we tell them to believe, we point them to Jesus, we say, "Believe, repent, follow Christ," and when they do, we praise whom? [We praise] God because we know if they [were saved] it was by His grace.

If you're sitting out there, and you're thinking, "Well, listen, man, I haven't given my life to Christ and I know that. I know I'm not a believer," or, "I'm not sure if I'm a believer," then you need to believe. You need to turn from your sins. You need to trust in Christ. You need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're out there thinking, "Well, I don't know if I can do that." Well, then, you beg God, you get desperate, you run to Christ. You beg Him. You make that the number one priority of your life until God saves you and your life is transformed. But, you don't sit back, and [say], "Well, you know, God has to save me. It's nothing of me. Therefore, I'm just going to sit back." No. God is sovereign, but He calls you to repentance. God is sovereign; He calls you to believe. If you repent and believe, it will be by His grace. He is not going to reject you if you are pounding at heaven's door, humbly confessing your sins, and asking Him to forgive you.

[The] fourth [fact is]: God's Law never fails. This is kind of a weird part of the passage [in Luke 16]. If you just took [these phrases] out of the context, they [would be] easy to understand. [Luke 16:]17 says, "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail." You realize, well, He's talking here about the enduring nature of the Law, that the Law never fails, that there are certain truths—eternal truths—contained in the Word of God [that] are going to abide forever, and are just never going to go away. OK. That is easy to understand. The "one stroke" just means the smallest little Hebrew accent mark is never going to go away. OK, that's easy. The question is: What's it doing here [in this passage in Luke 16]? We can understand that the "grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God abides forever" [see Isaiah 40:8], but what is that statement doing in this text? See, that is the trick.

I was thinking about this, and [thought], "Man, this is just kind of a nightmare passage." Sometimes when you're studying you just run into these little things, and you think, "Well, I understand that verse, but what is it doing here?" Let me just give you some reasons why I think this verse is here. First: Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, and I think He reminds them of the enduring nature of the Law—the unfailing nature of the Law—first to

let them know that even though the gospel of the kingdom is preached, and it's preached that you enter the kingdom by faith, the truth that salvation is by faith is not eradicating the Law.

Second: I think Jesus says "the Law will not fail" to let them know that if they don't trust in Him for salvation, what do they have left? [They have] the Law. See, you either get into heaven by faith in Jesus, or you get to be judged by the Law without mercy. What are you going to choose? It's pretty scary, pretty no-brainer. Are you going to run out of the hole in the wall and get out of the burning building, or are you going to stand there and figure your own way out? [If you] go with the Law, you get fire.

Then, Jesus says this little interesting statement in [Luke 16:]18, which we're going to save until the end of the series that is coming up on singles: "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery." What's that doing there? He's talking about money before [our passage and] He's talking about money after [it, so] what are all these weird verses [in there for]? It seems like they're all thrown in there, you know, like [a] little mixed salad of things. Well, Jesus put that in there because [the religious leaders] justified themselves in the sight of men, but they were wife swapping. They thought, "All the Law says is [that] we need to write a certificate of divorce and we can dump our [wives] and get [other] one[s]." They were just taking and receiving wives at will. So, Jesus mentions this violation of the Law so that they would know the Law has not failed. They were trusting in their righteousness, and Jesus says, "The Law is not failing. Just because salvation is by faith in Me doesn't mean the Law has failed. You're breaking the Law, which means you are going to be judged by the Law."

I want you to turn to one other place: Matthew 5. This is the Sermon on the Mount. I just want to take you [t]here and show you this other little cool thing, which talks about a similar phrase about the Law. In Matthew 5:13 and following, Jesus talks about us being the "salt of the earth" [5:13], "the light of the world" [5:14], [and how we must] "let [our] light shine before men" [5:]16. He's talking about [how] we need to be witnesses for Him to

lead people to Christ. It's the same exact thing He says in the near preceding context of our passage: "Use your wealth to win friends to Christ. Use the resources. You can't serve God and mammon. Honor God," which means use it for kingdom purposes, to equip the saints, [and] evangelize the lost. [It says] the same type of thing in [Matthew 5:]13–16.

Then, in [Matthew 5:]17–18, He says:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Notice the emphasis on the Law, just [as] Luke 16:16–17 [says]: "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed;" the Law is enduring and will not fail; and you are breaking the Law. That's basically what [Luke 16:]16–18 [is] saying. So, the question is this: Why does Jesus include this? It is for this simple reason. Jesus came to earth, was born of a virgin, so that He could be born without a sin nature. We all have sin natures, right? We are sinners in Adam. The sin nature is passed down from Adam to the fathers to the fathers to the fathers, so all the fathers all pass [it] down and do us a favor and give us the sin nature of Adam. Jesus, then, is born of a virgin and has who[m] as His father? [His father is] God. So, He escapes the curse and sin nature that has been passed down. Then, Jesus lives a perfect life and does what? [He] fulfills the Law, doesn't He? He obeys it perfectly. Then, He willingly offers Himself up on the cross to die the death we should have died, to make atonement for sins. [He] is buried, and then rises again, showing that He had done no sin, and He conquers death.

Now, get it. Why is it important that the Law never fails? [It is] because [of] this: Don't think that God has eradicated the Law and therefore you can get in and the Law is gone. The Law remains. You know what? God requires it of you. God requires of each and every one of us absolute, perfect obedience to [His] will. You say, "Well, Jack, how can you do that?" That is

exactly [the point to which] God wants you to get. You say, “Well, what do you mean?” You have to get to the place where you realize, “God, I can’t obey the Law perfectly.” God says, “OK, there’s one who did, and if you place your faith in Him, He is willing to take your sin from you, having died the death that you should have died, having suffered the wrath of God in your place, and He is willing to justify you, declare you to be righteous, and to give to you His perfect life of obedience—His perfect righteousness—so that you can fulfill the Law in Him.” That’s called the doctrine of substitution. That is why Jesus mentions, “The Law is not failing, Pharisees. And so, if you reject Me, you’re going to have to fulfill the Law on your own, and you’re not going to make it.”

What we need to realize in our lives today is: Have we run to Jesus? Have we gotten to the place where we have received Christ as our Savior? If we have, if we repent, if we believe in Jesus in saving faith, then what happens? We’re forgiven in Christ. We’re justified in Christ. We’re washed clean by the blood of Christ, and then Christ, because of His love for us, reckons to our account His perfect law-keeping so that God’s standard is still met, because He fulfills perfectly the Law that never fails, that will not pass away. We can stand before God perfect, holy, and just because of what Jesus did for us. This is what Jesus wanted the Pharisees to know, and which they wouldn’t believe.

Jesus, speaking to the religious leaders in John 5:45, says: “Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope.” You either get the Law without mercy judging you, or you get Christ’s righteousness given to you, all your sins taken away, and then you stand in Christ, perfect, before a holy God, acceptable in His sight. Those are the two paths. Everybody dies having taken [one of them].

So, as we leave here today, remember the lesson not to scoff at our need to be generous to God. It’s not a waste; it’s wise stewardship. Remember [that] you can fool men, but you can’t fool God. You may fool everybody around you that you are a very upright, faithful Christian, but God knows

your heart. See Jesus as the fire escape and flee from the wrath to come. Stampede for glory. Force your way in. Strive to enter the narrow way. Run for the only exit that is available, which is Christ, and remember [that] God's Law is not passing away. If you reject Christ, then your only other hope, which is no hope at all, is to fulfill the Law perfectly. That's what Jesus wants us to know. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the lessons we learned in this text. Father, You are so great to us, so good and kind. I pray that if there [are people] here who [don't] know You, that You would open their hearts, that Your grace would be poured out upon them, that they would believe, that they would scratch and claw, that they would say, "Lord, help my unbelief," that they would not stop pursuing You and Your salvation, which is in Christ alone, through faith alone, by grace alone because You are a good and loving God. May You save sinners this morning. And for the rest of us who know You, may we learn the lesson and praise You all the more for Your grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. We pray all this in Christ's name, Amen.

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