

## **Stewards of Unrighteousness**

Luke 16:1-9

Pastor Peter Hiett

November 19, 2006

### Children's Sermon:

Peter: "Hey kids, you wanna come forward for the children's message? Hey, guys, I wanted to show you this. Look what I got. [Peter is holding a single rose.] Isn't that cool? It's pretty. D'you think it's pretty? Does it smell nice?"

Kids: "Yeah. I want to smell it."

Peter: "You want to smell it? There you go. It's so pretty, and I really want it to last. You know? You think it will last?"

Kids: "No!"

Peter: "No? How come?"

Kids: "Because it doesn't have water."

Peter: "Okay, so if I gave it water, would it last?"

Kids: "Yeah."

Peter: "How long?"

Kids: "Forever."

Peter: "You think it would last forever? It wouldn't last forever. How come?"

Kids: "Because. Because the water gets dirty. Because it doesn't have roots."

Peter: "Because it doesn't have roots. This flower's been cut off. You know what this is? This is a dead flower because it's been cut off. It's a corpse flower. But I'd like it to last. How do I make it last?"

Kids: "By growing another one."

Peter: "By growing another one? Yeah, but then it would be different than this one."

Kids: "By putting it in a vase."

Peter: "By putting it in a vase? It would last a little while, but then it would die, right? Well, I have an idea. How about this? [Peter gives the flower to Susan.] You know who that is?"

Kids: "Your wife."

Peter: "My wife, my girlfriend... that's right. See, I think I can make it last by giving it away. Because, you know what, by giving it away I turn it into a message. And what did the message say?"

Kids: "I love you."

Peter: "I love you. That's right. And that message lasts forever. And it also bears fruit, but that's another story. Anyway, that's kind of like our stuff. If you hang on to it, it kind of gets old and boring and doesn't last, you know what I mean? No stuff lasts, it gets old and boring, but if you give stuff away, you turn it into a message like, "I love you." Well, that's just something to think about, okay? So let's pray.

God, we really like to keep our stuff. You know that, huh? But when we just hang on to it, God, it gets old and boring and doesn't last. And so, Jesus, would You help

us to be more like You and give our stuff away? Turn it into a message? A message that might just last forever. So, Jesus, thank You that You have done that for us. And I pray that these kids, Lord, just have a great time downstairs at Kids on the Mount. In Jesus' name we pray, amen."

Sermon:

[A video clip is shown from Babette's Feast. A feast is being served.]

General: "One day in Paris, after I had won a riding competition, my French fellow officers invited me out to dine at one of the finest restaurants, the Café Anglais. The chef, surprisingly enough, was a woman. We were served Cailles en Sarcophage, a dish of her own creation. General Galliffet, who was our host for the evening, explained that this woman, the head chef, had the ability to transform a dinner into a kind of love affair, a love affair that made no distinction between bodily appetite and spiritual appetite. General Galliffet said that in the past he had fought a duel for the love of a beautiful woman. But now there was no woman in Paris for whom he would shed his blood—except this chef. She was considered the greatest culinary genius. What we are now eating is nothing less than Cailles en Sarcophage."

That's Babette's Feast.

Well, it's just interesting what the General says,

“There is one chef that can transform a dinner into a kind of love affair, a love affair that makes no distinction between bodily appetite and spiritual appetite.” That is, a banquet of ordinary perishable food could be transformed into something spiritual, eternal... perishable physical substance with eternal, spiritual content.

Wouldn't it be something if there was a banquet like that? Wouldn't it be something if there was a chef, an artist, like that? Someone that could take the perishable things of this world and transform them into an eternal love affair?

Well, it's just a movie and now it's time to preach. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we pray that you would help us to preach.

In Luke 14, Jesus says, “When you have a banquet invite the people who can't repay you. . . . Go to the highways and byways and compel them to come in.” Jesus says the kingdom of God is like that, and it's at hand.

In Luke 15, the scribes and Pharisees murmur: “That Jesus parties with tax collectors and sinners.” And Jesus tells stories:

A lost sheep is found and there is a party.

A lost coin is found and there is a party.

A lost boy is found and there is a party.

A second lost boy (the older brother) gets angry because the Father spends a lot of money to find his little brother and throw parties.

It's money that the older brother considers his own. Technically, I suppose it is, but only because this boy wished his father dead, took his father's stuff, and the

father let him. He has his father's world, but he's cut off from his father.

Well, there is a lot of partying going on in Luke 14-15. The question arises, "Who's gonna pay for all these parties?"

Luke 16:1, Jesus tells another story.

*He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a steward [A steward is one who manages what belongs to another, his master.], and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting [Squandering... he is squandering his master's goods. It's the same word used to describe how the prodigal squandered his unrighteous inheritance money.] his goods. 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.' 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. I have decided what to do, so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'*

He's operating as a steward on behalf of his master. They don't yet know that he's been caught and has to turn in his books. So this steward is giving away the master's stuff, stuff that he previously squandered on himself. He's giving it away at his master's expense. In financial terms he's forgiving his master's debtors to endear himself to them. He says to this debtor,

*'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' 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.'*

He is stealing from the master to give to the master's debtors. The master finds out and now here comes the punch line...

*The master commended the dishonest steward [unrighteous steward, literally "steward of unrighteousness"] for his shrewdness; for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. 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 [literally "eternal tabernacles"].*

"Mommy, tell me a Bible story."

"Well, honey, there was this conniving, dishonest crook of a steward who bought some friends and influence with stolen property in order to cover his tail so he

wouldn't have to sleep under a bridge... And Jesus says we should be more like him. . . ”

“And now the offering... win friends and influence people, obtain luxury accommodations. Quick, give now before the master finds out.”

Maybe that's how we should call for the offering.

Well, can you see why this story has been a source of controversy? Why on earth would Jesus make a con artist an example for us? A lying thief, a couple prodigal boys, tax collectors, and whores... why would Jesus make a lying crook an example for us?

Well, what else does he have to work with? I mean, you gotta start somewhere. Who else could we relate to?

Maybe you say, “Hey, I'm not a crook. I bought my house with cash.”

Well, who'd you buy it from?

“The builder.”

What did the builder build it with?

“Lumber.”

Where'd the builder get the lumber?

“The lumber company.”

Where'd the lumber company get their wood?

“From trees.”

Who made the trees?

“Only God can make trees.”

Did they pay for the trees or just cut them down?

I think you're living in a stolen house, eating stolen food. Can you make food? All food is life, plants or animals. Can you make life? Maybe you can grow life, nurture life, like a farmer or a steward, but you can't make life, only cut it down, rearrange it, and eat it.

So you live in a stolen house, eating stolen food, purchased with laundered money, and you say,

"Hey, I earned that money!"

With what?

"My time, talent, and brains."

Well, where'd you get your time, talent, and brains? Did you earn your time, talent, and brains? Did you earn you? Did you create you?

"Yes, with good choices," you might say.

Well, did you choose the you that did the choosing?

"No!"

It's all because of I AM that you are. "All because of You-I AM." [This was the song at the offertory.]

You could say, "God gave me me. So 'me' is mine."

Yep, you could say that... unless of course, you're a Christian. For then, you've given me back. You've surrendered you, and not to your credit.

You do realize "Lord" means "Master" and "Master" means "Owner." To call Jesus "Lord" is to call yourself His slave. Have you ever sung, "I Surrender All?"



It's not "give," but "surrender" because it's not rightfully yours.

And if you say, "I tithe to the Lord. I give 10% to the Lord," it means you're stealing 90% from the Lord and feeling proud of it.

In the Old Testament, they gave 10% to the Levites and temple worship and 10% every 3 years to the poor and 10% every year for a humongous mandatory party in Jerusalem. And yet they knew, "The earth was the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

In the New Testament, Jesus makes it explicit... we're stewards. Slaves and stewards don't have private property.

And by the way, that's what "mammon" means. It's "personalized wealth." That is, "possessions." Most simply put, "private property." So when Jesus refers to "unrighteous mammon," I think He's referring to all mammon... private property.

He doesn't mean your property belongs to the government. You're not a Marxist. He means it belongs to Him. You're a Christian.

So, if you refer to Jesus as "Lord" and then anything else as your private possession, well, you call yourself a liar. For then Jesus isn't your Lord or you call yourself a crook for you've stolen from your Master.

If you say, "Hold on, Peter. That's the way this world is. That's the way people are. Peter, that's the way you are. What do you expect from me?"

Well, that's exactly what I expect from you. You're a crook; I'm a crook. That is, we are sinners, born into a rebel world. And so maybe this parable has something to do with us and our world.

According to scripture, the entire world is cut off from life somehow. It's been cursed and will pass away. Hang onto it, and you will, too.

James writes,

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,  
and the rich in his humiliation, because like  
the flower of the grass he will pass away.  
For the sun rises with its scorching heat and  
withers the grass; its flower falls, and its  
beauty perishes. So will the rich man fade  
away in the midst of his pursuits.

“Like the flower...” Riches are like flowers.  
They're beautiful in the midst of an ugly world. So we're  
compelled to pick them for ourselves. But when we do,  
they die.

Whatever I pick and think I possess seems to die.

Toys lose their luster.

Houses get old.

Even people get boring and ugly once I think I  
own them, like flowers, cut flowers.

We can't make a flower, but we pick them, sell them,  
pocket the cash, as if they were our own.

Riches are like flowers. We pick them for ourselves, they  
die, and we die, and they become flowers to cover  
our grave.

Why do we cut flowers and put them on graves?  
Maybe we try to cover our own death with stolen life?

I bet you, the thought of picking flowers never even occurred to Adam and Eve until the serpent tempted them to pick the fruit for themselves. They did and condemned their offspring as flower pickers, unable to enjoy the flowers where they'd been planted.

In C.S. Lewis' novel *Paralandra*, a man travels to Venus, a new garden of Eden. He tastes a fruit that is better than his ability to describe (not part of a condemned world). He smells bubble flowers that burst over him, then he thinks about picking more fruit, more flowers, possessing them as security against the uncertainty of his future. But then the idea seems vulgar and Lewis writes,

This itch to have things over again, as if life were a film that could be unrolled twice or even made to work backwards. . . Was it possibly the root of all evil? No: of course the love of money was called that. But money itself—perhaps one valued it chiefly as a defense against chance, a security for being able to have things over again, a means of arresting the unrolling of the film.

In this fallen world, we know how the film unrolls. It unrolls in judgment and death. This world has been picked, cut off from the source of life.

So we surround ourselves with condemned riches for security. We cover our own graves with cut flowers.

Many years ago, a little mild man who worked in a cemetery would receive a letter each week from a certain woman. Enclosed was always a money order for fresh cut flowers and directions to place the flowers on the grave of her son. One day after several years of this, a car drove up

to the cemetery and a chauffeur walked into the tiny administration building to speak to the clerk.

“The lady outside is too ill to walk,” he explained. “Would you mind coming with me?”

Waiting in the car was a frail, elderly woman. Her eyes could not hide some deep, long-lasting hurt. In her arms was a great heap of flower. “I am Mrs. Adams,” she explained. “Every week for years I have been sending you a money order...”

“For the flowers!” the clerk exclaimed.

“Yes—to be laid on the grave of my son.”

“I have never failed to attend to it,” chirped the little man.

“I came here today,” Mrs. Adams confided softly, “because the doctors have let me know I have only a few weeks left. I shall not be sorry to go. There was nothing left to live for. But before I die I wanted to drive here for one last look and to place the flowers myself.”

Dead flowers placed on a dead corpse by a dying woman, if for just a moment to cover the obvious.

Well, now that I’ve brightened your day, let me point out not only is Jesus saying we’re crooked stewards, I think He’s also pointing out we’re stupid stewards, “For what does this profit a woman/a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?”

One day the Master will demand an accounting. He’ll say:

“What are you doing with those flowers in your hand?”

“What are you doing with my house that you’re staying in?”

“Hey, that’s my car. What are you doing with my car?”

“What are you doing with that heartbeat in your chest?”

“What are you doing with my bread? My wine?”

That day will come and in fact, it’s already here. He’s informed you, “You must hand in the books.” So what’re you gonna do? Play dumb?

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and not feed you? When did we see you thirsty and not give you drink?”

It won’t work.

“Lord, we had to stop work on the seminary in Mozambique, and Lord we had to let the Youth Director go ‘cause we didn’t have the money.”

It won’t work. He knows we have more than enough money.

I’m not saying you necessarily have to give here. I’m just saying pretending we don’t have money won’t work.

If we just sold the cars we drove to church this weekend...  $1,000 \times \$20,000 = \$20 \text{ million}$ . That’s four seminaries in Mozambique and a lifetime supply of Youth Directors.

God’s good at math, so don’t play dumb. The steward in our story didn’t; he got smart. Like the prodigal got smart. He doesn’t get good, just intelligent. He can’t make himself good, just like the prodigal can’t make himself good.

Yet like the prodigal, he develops a shrewd plan based on the only hope left to him. And that hope is the mercy of the Master.

His Master is extremely kind, as evidenced by the fact that the steward is not already in jail.

So the steward summons his Master's debtors, and in the Master's name, he forgives these debtors large portions of their bills. So instead of stealing his Master's stuff for himself, he's stealing his Master's stuff for these other debtors.

Undoubtedly in a few minutes this village is abuzz with Gospel, good news. They start to party. People talk and this is what they say:

"The Master is exceedingly gracious. Blessed is He." And, "Blessed are the feet of him that brings this good news. Certainly we'd have him over for dinner or give him a place to stay."

Well, the Master finds out, and says to this steward, "Hey... way to go. Now you're getting it! I like it. I like it when you give gifts to debtors at my expense." That is, when you're preaching my Gospel.

Perhaps at this point the steward's heart cracks, like the prodigal's heart cracked, and the Master's mercy makes him good. We don't know.

But we do know Jesus is saying,

"Guys, if only you could be that smart. If you don't have a heart, at least use your brain (and maybe someone will give you a heart)."

"Use the condemned stuff of this world to win friends for yourself and for me."

"Stop using people to get things and use things to get people. That's what things are for."

"You're already thieves. Be Robin Hood thieves. Steal from me and give it to the poor."

“I forgive you. I give myself, my life to you.”

“What you steal, I turn into gift. I for-give you.”

“I forgive you that you might forgive them.”

“Throw parties for sinners.”

“Pay for parties for sinners using the money you stole from me.”

“You can’t grow flowers, but you’ve already picked mine. What are you gonna do with it?”

He says to us, “You can’t grow one flower, but you picked me, cut me. What will you do with me?”

I read about a bus bumping along a back road in the South. In one seat a wispy old man sat holding a bunch of fresh flowers. Across the aisle was a young girl whose eyes came back again and again at the man’s flowers. The time came for the old man to get off. Impulsively, he thrust the flowers into the girl’s lap. “I can see you love the flowers,” he explained, “and I think my wife would like for you to have them. I’ll tell her I gave them to you.” The girl accepted the flowers and then watched the old man get off the bus and walk through the gate of a small cemetery.

His bride wasn’t there, only his memories. And so he was tempted to think his memories were dead, that faith, hope, and love were dead.

Well, you can’t grow flowers, but you pick them... You pick them to adorn your own grave but then they do no

good. Cut flowers will perish, but you can give them away. And when you give them away they carry a message, like faith, hope, or love. The flowers are dead, but the message is living, even eternal.

Cut flowers are dead flowers (dead organs of reproduction). But give 'em away and they can bear incredible fruit. Actually, flowers are designed to die and turn into seeds, but you have to give 'em away.

At a marriage seminar, the instructor said, "It's essential that husbands know how to send the right message. Husbands do you know your wife's favorite flower?"

Wally leaned over, touched his wife's arm gently and whispered, "Pillsbury, All Purpose... right, honey?"

And thus began Wally's life of celibacy.

You see, if the flower is for you, it won't bear much fruit. Ask Wally. But if you give it away, especially to the Bride, it can bear a whole lot of fruit (even babies, and certainly faith, hope, and love).

Faith, hope, and love. They are eternal. They don't die. Mercy is an eternal word that will not return void. A seed that will bear much fruit. And it can be attached to things, like a cup of cold water, a basin and a towel, a \$20 bill, or a cut flower.

Richard Wurmbrand tells about a communist Captain who one day was thrown in a prison cell with many of the Christians he had once tortured. They surrounded him and asked for an explanation. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he told them this story:

Two months ago I was sitting in my office



when a 12 year old boy entered holding a flower. He said, “Captain, you imprisoned my father and mother. Today is my mother’s birthday. I always buy her a flower on this day. Because of you I have no mother to gladden this day, but she is a Christian and taught me to love my enemies... So I thought I would bring a flower to the mother of your children. Please give it to your wife. Tell her about my love and the love of Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

At that, the Captain broke, embraced the boy, and embraced Jesus, and so ended up in this prison, filled with Saints, more free than he’d ever been.

Jesus said, “I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal habitation.”

It must’ve been tempting for that boy to think only of his pain and hang on to that flower and not make friends. Like it’s tempting for you to think only of your pain and hang onto your stuff, but that’s stupid. That’s not what stuff is for. Stuff is for obtaining fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, daughters, sons in the eternal habitation. Stuff won’t fix the pain, but give it away, and the eternal habitations will.

Well, like I told you, this lady, Mrs. Adams, came to place flowers on the grave of her son. She said to the clerk, “Before I die, I wanted to drive here and place the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Wurmbrand, Reaching Toward the Heights

flowers myself.”

The little clerk, he made up his mind and spoke. “You know, ma’am, I was always sorry you kept sending the money for the flowers.”

“Sorry?”

“Yes, because the flowers last such a little while! And nobody ever could see them or smell them. It was a shame.”

“Do you realize what you are saying?”

“Oh, please don’t be angry. I belong to a visiting society. State hospitals. Insane asylums. People in places like that dearly love flowers, and they can see them and can smell them. Lady, there’s living people in places like that. But there isn’t anybody in that grave. Not really.”

The woman didn’t answer, but sat for a brief while, silently repeating a prayer. She left without a word.

The little clerk thought he made a terrible mistake. But some months later he was astonished to have another visit; doubly astonished, in fact, because there was no chauffeur this time; the woman sat at the wheel, driving her car alone.

“I take flowers to the people myself,” she confided with a friendly smile. “You were right, it does make them happy. And it makes me happy, The doctors don’t know what is making me well—but I do! I have something to live for now!”<sup>2</sup>

What’s making her well? The eternal habitations. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Eternal life begins in this world, said Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> Fulton Oursler, Modern Parables

When we give dead stuff in love, it's infused with life. In John 14:23 Jesus said, "Keep my commands and you love me. Love me and my Father, and we will make our home, our habitation, with you."

So surrender your tabernacles. Surrender your lives. Surrender you things, and He will infuse them with Himself. He is faith, hope, love, truth, light, and life. Eternal life.

You can hold flowers to yourself and they die, you die, and even your ability to enjoy them dies. They've been cut off from life to adorn your grave.

But if you give flowers in love, they become sacramental. If you give unrighteous mammon in love, it becomes sacramental. It becomes a love affair, and there is nothing more enjoyable... and fruitful.

In *Babette's Feast*, the general said, "In Paris there was this chef that had the ability to transform a dinner into a kind of love affair that made no distinction between bodily appetite and spiritual appetite." That's called a sacrament.

And it turns out that the chef from the great city is the very same woman preparing the meal that night. She's doing it in the least likely place, this Danish religious community of older brothers and Pharisees. Guilt ridden old people, hanging onto their dignity like cut flowers withering in the sun. There are only twelve left.

Years before, Babette had been exiled from France and so came to serve this austere little religious community. After 14 years of servitude, she wins 10,000 francs from a lottery in France (unrighteous mammon).

As a last request before she leaves, she begs the community to give her the privilege of serving them one last supper.

Well, the supper is an astonishing banquet that transforms the twelve even as they eat it. They begin to enjoy each other, forgive each other, delight in each other.

After dinner they join hands and dance around a well singing, "Eternity is near... so our true home we'll find." The old guy says, "Alleluia!" And the old women go to the house to say goodbye to Babette.

There she tells them that in fact she is the famous chef from the city of lights, and then she informs them that she is not leaving.

[A video clip is shown of this scene as Babette talks with the old women.]

Martina: "You're not going back to Paris?"

Babette: "There no one waiting for me there. They're all dead. And I have no money."

Martina: "No money? But the 10,000 francs?"

Babette: "All spent."

Martina: "10,000 francs?"

Babette: "Dinner for twelve at the Café Anglais costs 10,000 francs."

Philippa: "But dear Babette... You should not have given all you owned for us."

Babette: "It was not just for you."

You see, it was for an eternal habitation. It came down to earth that very night in that very room.

Martina then says, “Babette, now you’ll be poor the rest of your life.”

Babette replies, “An artist is never poor. . . I was able to make them happy.”

Philippa says, “In paradise you will be the great artist that God meant you to be. Oh! You will delight the angels.”

Of course, Babette is a picture of the greatest artist, the delight of all the angels, the One in whom and through whom all things were created and are created... Jesus the Christ.

Like Babette, He came to the most unlikely place, gave everything He had and prepared a banquet for twelve.

I believe it’s the same banquet served in the eternal city of light. It is His very life and love.

He prepared a banquet for twelve and for all. And won Himself an eternal habitation, an eternal tabernacle. Now, who is the Lord’s tabernacle? Us.

Jesus is not an unrighteous steward, and yet He is the steward of unrighteousness. I mean, Jesus takes all the unrighteousness of this world to His cross, and there He transforms it into a banquet of mercy, and there He transforms us into His eternal habitation.

So on that night at table with the twelve, He gave all He had. He took the bread and broke it saying, “This is my body given for you.” He took the cup and said, “This is my blood of the covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Take and eat. Take and drink.”

Maybe God does give us one private possession: Himself. He is good. This is what makes you good. This is

what redeems the Father's world. This is the sacrament. Ingest it in faith and you become a sacrament, too: His eternal habitation, His body.

In a few songs we'll offer those giving cards and ask Him to turn our unrighteous mammon into sacrament as well.

### Communion

When the band begins to play, "Take my life and let it be consecrated" (that is, sacramental) would you come forward and lay your giving card here before the table. Giving cards are simply what you plan to give. They are not payment, not a deal, and not a promise or vow.

Now, all you have and all you are is to be a gift of love (a sacrament). But would you take a moment, if you haven't, and ask the Lord, "Lord, what would you like me to give in and through Lookout this year?"

Write it down and bring your card forward. Place it on the stage. But I want you to picture yourself handing flowers to a bride, the Lord's Bride. Picture tax collectors, prostitutes, Pharisees, and harlots, orphans, and widows. Lonely people. Tired people. Guilty people. The Lord's Bride, His lost Bride.

You're handing her a message, an eternal message, "All your debts are forgiven. Jesus loves you more than you can begin to know."

### Benediction

Now if you think, gosh Peter, I think I live in a stolen house, drive a stolen car, eat stolen food, but I need a

house, a car, and food to live. Yet now I don't think I can enjoy them.

Actually you can enjoy them more... with just one word... "Thanks." Thanksgiving is this week. Say, "Thank you for letting me stay in your house, Jesus. Thank you for letting me wear your tie, eat your turkey."

With just that one word, you surrender stolen property and receive it as a gift. This week in Jesus' name, give thanks.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

One day in Paris, after I had won a riding competition, my French fellow officers invited me out to dine at one of the finest restaurants, the Café Anglais. The chef, surprisingly enough, was a woman. We were served Cailles en Sarcophage, a dish of her own creation. General Galliffet, who was our host for the evening, explained that this woman, the head chef, had the ability to transform a dinner into a kind of love affair, a love affair that made no distinction between bodily appetite and spiritual appetite. General Galliffet said that in the past he had fought a duel for the love of a beautiful woman. But now there was no woman in Paris for whom he would shed his blood—except this chef. She was considered the greatest culinary genius.

~ Isak Dinesen, *Babette's Feast*

He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." When one of those who sat at table with him heard this, he said to him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many." . . . Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." . . . "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry. . . . It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" 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.

~ Luke 14:12-16, 15:1-2,  
15:22-24, 15:32-16:1 (RSV)

Steward, a word used to translate a number of terms and expressions in the Bible common to all of which is the idea of 'overseeing' the possessions, business affairs, property, servants, the training of children, etc. of an owner or master.

~ *Harper's Bible Dictionary*



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." 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. I have decided what to do, so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship." So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, "How much do you owe my master?" He said, "A hundred measures of oil." And he said to him, "Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty." 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." 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. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails. . .

~ Luke 16:2-9a (RSV)

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

~ James 1:9-11

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for

"All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
but the word of the Lord remains forever."  
And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

~ 1 Peter 1:22-25

A survey of expenditures in the late 1980's and early 1990's demonstrated that Americans spent annually twice as much on cut flowers as on overseas Protestant ministries.

~ Craig Blomberg, Neither Poverty nor Riches

Now we had come to a part of the wood where great globes of yellow fruit hung from the trees. . . It was like the discovery of a totally new genus of pleasures, something unheard of among men, out of all reckoning, beyond all covenant. For one draught of this on earth wars would be fought and nations betrayed. It could not be classified. He could never tell us, when he came back to the world of men, whether it was sharp or sweet, savoury or voluptuous,

creamy or piercing. “Not like that” was all he could ever say to such inquiries. And he let the empty gourd fall from his hand and was about to pluck a second one, it came into his head that he was not neither hungry nor thirsty. And yet to repeat a pleasure so intense and almost so spiritual seemed an obvious thing to do. His reason, or what we commonly take to be reason in our own world, was all in favour of tasting this miracle again; the childlike innocence of fruit, the labours he had undergone, the uncertainty of the future, all seemed to commend the action. Yet something seemed opposed to this “reason”. It is difficult to suppose that this opposition came from desire, for what desire would turn from so much deliciousness? But for whatever cause, it appeared to him better not to taste again. Perhaps the experience had been so complete that repetition would be a vulgarity—like asking to hear the same symphony twice in the same day. . . . He had always disliked the people who encored a favourite air in the opera—“That just spoils it” had been his comment. But this now appeared to him as a principle of far wider application and deeper moment. This itch to have things over again, as if life were a film that could be unrolled twice or even made to work backwards. . . Was it possibly the root of all evil? No: of course the love of money was called that. But money itself—perhaps one valued it chiefly as a defense against chance, a security for being able to have things over again, a means of arresting the unrolling of the film.

~ C.S. Lewis, *Paralandra*

Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

~ 1 Timothy 6:7-10

**A**nd 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 [literally, “tabernacles”].

~ Luke 16:9 (RSV)

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.”

~ Revelation 21:3 (NKJV)

Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.

~ John 6:27

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. . . . Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

~ *Matthew 6:19-21, 25:34-40*

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

~ *John 14:21*

During the service the Lord showed me a vision of myself sitting in the church during the offering and when the offering plate was passed by, I put into it everything. That is everything I have, my possessions, my house, my cars, my furniture, my movies, as well as my job, my kids, my wife, my health... every aspect of my life including my own life. I saw that the rest of the people in the rows were doing the same thing and as the offering plate was passed down, Jesus was standing at the end of the row. He would receive the plate, all of its contents would turn into blood and He would drink it. Then the plate (contents or not I don't know) would be filled with fire and He would pass the plate back down the same row. As each person touched it, they would catch on fire. . . .

~ *Dale Eben, 9-3-2005, LMCC*

**A**nd 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. . . . And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my

body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

~ *Luke 16:9, 22:17-20*

There comes a time when your eyes are opened. And we come to realize that mercy is infinite. We need only await it with confidence, and receive it with gratitude. Mercy imposes no conditions. And, lo! Everything we have chosen has been granted to us, and everything we have rejected has also been granted. Yes, we even get back what we rejected. For mercy and truth are met together; and righteousness and bliss shall kiss one another. . . .

Martina: You're not going back to Paris?

Babette: There is no one waiting for me there. They're all dead. And I have no money.

Martina: No money? But the 10,000 francs?

Babette: All spent.

Martina: 10,000 francs?

Babette: Dinner for twelve at the Café Anglais costs 10,000 francs.

Philippa: But dear Babette. . . You should not have given all you owned for us.

Babette: It was not just for you.

Martina: Now you'll be poor for the rest of your life.

Babette: An artist is never poor.

Philippa: Did you prepare that sort of dinner at Café Anglais?

Babette: I was able to make them happy when I gave of my very best. . . .  
“Throughout the world sounds one long cry from the heart of the artist: ‘Give me the chance to do my very best.’”

Philippa: But that is not the end, Babette, I'm certain of that. In paradise, you will be the great artist that God meant you to be. Ah, how you will delight the angels!

~ *Isak Dinesen, Babette's Feast*

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

~ *Revelation 19:9*

**H**e 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. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? 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.

~ *Luke 16:10-13 (RSV)*

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

~ *1 Peter 4:7-11*

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**Lookout Mountain Community Church**

534 Commons Drive, Golden CO 80401

Phone: 303-526-9287 Fax: 303-526-9361

E-mail: [info@lomcc.org](mailto:info@lomcc.org)