

"FOOTBALL FAITH (#1): IN THE POCKET"

(Luke 16:1-13)

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[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 10-15-23]

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1. **[BOTH 9am AND 11am... Read Text: Luke 16:1-13 and Pray....**
"1 Jesus also said to the disciples, "A certain rich man heard that his household manager was wasting his estate. 2 He called the manager in and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give me a report of your administration because you can no longer serve as my manager.' 3 "The household manager said to himself, What will I do now that my master is firing me as his manager? I'm not strong enough to dig and too proud to beg. 4 I know what I'll do so that, when I am removed from my management position, people will welcome me into their houses. 5 "One by one, the manager sent for each person who owed his master money. He said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 He said, 'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil.' The manager said to him, 'Take your contract, sit down quickly, and write four hundred fifty gallons.' 7 Then the manager said to another, 'How much do you owe?' He said, 'One thousand bushels of wheat.' He said, 'Take your contract and write eight hundred.' 8 "The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted cleverly. People who belong to this world are more clever in dealing with their peers than are people who belong to the light. 9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to make friends for yourselves so that when it's gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal homes. 10 "Whoever is faithful with little is also faithful with much, and the one who is dishonest with little is also dishonest with much. 11 If you haven't been faithful with worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 If you haven't been faithful with someone else's property, who will give you your own? 13 No household servant can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.""]

2. Fall is the time of year where there begins to be a nip in the air, color in the trees, and leaves on the ground.

 A--Here in America, its also a time for our favorite past-time: *football*, whether its high school, college, or pro. ¹

 B--And in the game of football, arguably the most important position is that of the quarterback -- the player who receives the ball initially when it is "snapped."

1--Of course, there've been some great quarterbacks in the history of the game, but -- being from Atlanta -- the ones I remember following most vividly are ones from Atlanta Falcons history: Steve Bartkowski, Chris Chandler, Michael Vick, Matt Ryan, and others.

2--But regardless of who *your* favorite quarterback is (if you *have* one), what the good ones all have in common is their ability to effectively share the ball with their team-mates in some way (whether "handing it off" at ground level or "passing" it overhead) in order to advance it down the field of play.

3. Well, today we're beginning a short, three-week sermon series called "**Football Faith**", in which we're using both scripture and metaphors from the game of football to go on a journey exploring the benefits of *generosity* -- like a good quarterback, we're learning the value of *sharing*, and how it enables us to be good players on *God's* "team."

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4. We began by hearing Jesus' parable Luke 16 about a dishonest businessman who keeps out of trouble with his boss by very shrewdly decreasing the debts owed to him.

A--Now, Jesus here is NOT saying that it's okay to avoid paying our debts, or to misuse our money, but that we as his followers need to be *just* as passionate about the *right* way to handle possessions as some people are about the *wrong* way to handle them.

B--And I think the key to what he's talking about is actually found at the beginning of the story, where (in Vs.1) he says that "*There was a rich man who had a... MANAGER...*"

1--In other words, the resources that this businessman was shrewdly juggling *didn't* belong to *him* at all, but to *someone else* -- he was merely a steward/manager of those things.

2--Just like in the game of football, the ball doesn't *belong* to the quarterback. No, he's merely the *steward/manager* of it for short while -- just long enough to determine *who* to *share* it with so that the *team* can advance it downfield.

3--The quarterback has to decide who's open, has to execute handoffs, or even be prepared to call an "audible" when the team needs a new play.

4--So, when a quarterback drops back into what's called "the pocket" -- the safe zone created by his offensive linemen for him to "read" the field so can safely pass the ball -- he's in effect being a "manager/steward" of who gets the ball.

C--In this story, Jesus first and foremost wants us to understand that if you and I want to learn how to be a team-player on God's team, then it starts with us understanding and recognizing that we don't "own" *anything*...

D--...That *all* that we have -- our money, homes, cars, smart-devices, *as well as* our *relationships* like with our spouse, children, family and friends -- all of these things actually belong to someone else (God), & that -- like this businessman was *supposed to be*, & like an effective quarterback *is* -- you & I are merely "Stewards/Managers." ²

5. Unfortunately, in Jesus' story, this businessman had forgotten that he was part of a *team*-- that he didn't really *own* his master's lands or his possessions, but merely *oversaw* them.

A--In a sense, he was kind of like a *bad* quarterback, focused on *staying* "in the pocket" with the ball -- a "pocket", therefore, that was his *own*, keeping his master's debtors at bay, and selfishly holding on to what he *should* have been *sharing* with others.

B--Like a quarterback who selfishly tucks the ball and runs on every play, trying to gain yards all by himself, this man is so selfish that he's willing to cheat both his master and others in order to serve *himself*.

6. You know, today's world is unfortunately filled with people who are like that -- using their money and possessions merely to serve their *own* self-focused interests.

A--Oh, their wealth might *look* impressive on the outside, but it never makes a positive impact in the world: How does Jesus put it in Verse 13? "*No household servant can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*"

B--What I think he means by this is that you and I cannot be *both* self-focused *and* generous at the same time; that we cannot serve *both* God *and* our own possessions simultaneously.

C--And just to clarify... Jesus' words here are *not* spoken to secular people out *in the world*, but to his *followers*; to people like you and me, who are in his "church"!

7. So what I think he's saying is that you & I are (in a sense) the quarterback of our possessions -- the "manager/steward" of the things and people who God has entrusted to our care.

A--They are *not* "ours," but we DO get to decide *how* to use them.

1--We can choose to keep them for *ourselves*, or to *give them away* to others and to ministries that help others.

2--Like the selfish manager (and a really bad quarterback), our possessions (our "ball", if you will) can stay "in the pocket", or we can choose to pass them to others, with the hope that they enable God's "team" to make forward progress on the "field of play" called "life."

B--One of the primary virtues and practices that my sister and I were taught by our parents while growing up was *generosity* -- the importance of sharing and helping others by using our time, talents, & (when we were older & started earning it), money.

1--But it wasn't until my late teens while reading a book by Edwin Cole about being a Godly man that I was convinced and convicted that the *first & primary* conduit through which this generosity should occur is my local church.³

2--And since that time, Trish and I both have tried to make it a point not only to be generous with what we have, but to share that generosity *first* through our local congregation before sharing it through other means.

C--Now I don't share that to say how good I am (because there are times that she and I are not as generous as we need to be, either!). However, imagine, if you will, a church (a "team") where everyone is self-less.

1--Imagine the kind of impact Cornerstone UMC can make both in our community and in our world if we choose to be faithful and generous with what God has entrusted to us.

2--...If we will but learn and remember the difference between being *self-ish* and *self-less*... between *stinginess* & *generosity*... between *stewardship* & *ownership*

3--And if we'll remember, too, that a *CHURCH* is only as self-less and generous as the *individuals* who make it up.

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8. So as I wrap up, let me simply ask: **what kind of manager/steward ("quarterback") are you of God's gifts?**

A--Do you generously *share* what you have -- your time, talents, relationships, and (yes) your money to help and bless others through the work of God's "team" (your church)? or do you keep them merely to serve yourself, and at most only share the "left-overs"?

B--Jesus' words today remind us that we can't have it both ways: we can't say we love God and at the same time be stingy with our resources.

9. He teaches us that when we choose to view and use our possessions as things that ultimately belong to *God* and not us, then it changes how we use them:...

A--...Not as much of it stays "*In The Pocket*" because we've made the choice to be *generous* people -- to "share the ball," enabling God's team (his "church") to score!

B--My prayer today is that each of us will understand and practice God's will for us *not* to be *Owners* but *Stewards/Managers* of all that we have.

10. [CLOSING PRAYER]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Even though many of you know that I'm more of a baseball fan than anything, in the Fall, one can't *help* but be *some* kind of football fan (including me!).

² It is true, at least for tangible things, that we earn a paycheck so we can buy them. But we earn that salary by using our talents or skills or brains. And from where did *those* come? You see, our schools and families can help to hone our skills and intelligence, but do they actually *give* us those things? Of course not! And this means that ultimately, all that we have in life -- our material possessions, as well as our intangible relationships -- come from the hand of God Himself. HE is the owner. WE are merely Stewards/Managers. This point is actually further reinforced by the context of today's parable: in the five stories prior to this one, Jesus tells other parables that describe the role of money and possessions in a person's life. And since he knew that the Pharisees and religious leaders were overhearing, his words were actually a chastising of them for their mixing up of the love of money with love of God's kingdom (Read Luke 16:14).

³ Edwin Louis Cole, Communications, Sex and Money (Honor Books, 1991; republished in 2014 as Edwin Cole, Communication Sex And Money: Overcoming the Three Common Challenges in Relationships (Resolute Books, 2014), still available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).