

“FOOTBALL FAITH (#1): IN THE POCKET”

(Luke 16:1-13)

© 2009 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 10-25-09]

–I–

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read Text: Luke 16:1-13 and Pray.

2. There’s a nip in the air. Leaves on the trees are changing colors and starting to fall.

A–Many of us have changed out the summer clothes in our closets for winter ones. We’ve pulled out our sweaters and dusted off our coats.

B–And even though baseball playoffs are in progress, it’s American *Football* that begins to dominate the sports scene every weekend: Friday night High School games; Saturday college games; and Sunday pro games – ...

C–...Each often accompanied by tailgate parties and get-togethers at homes and sports bars. And for many people, the season of Fall/Autumn is all about Football.

3. But it’s also a time that Christian churches have traditionally taken to remind us all of the biblical relationship between money/possessions and our spiritual life.

A–It’s a concept we call “Stewardship,” and its also a subject that many of us (quite frankly) don’t like to hear, even though we *need* to.

B–So, to help us be a little more at ease with this subject, I thought it would be good to connect this thing that we as a culture are *not* very passionate about (Stewardship) with something that we *are* very passionate about (Football).

C–That’s why over the next four weeks as we share in our own Fall Stewardship focus (the “*Will You Grow?*” focus that you’ve been hearing and reading about), I’d like to unpack some of God’s timeless principles for stewardship by relating them to metaphors from the game of Football.

4. Today we’ll begin with the metaphor called “IN THE POCKET.”

–II–

5. Now, to see how this is related to Christian Stewardship, though, we first need to understand today’s scripture from Luke 16.

[Contemp. Service ONLY: Let me read it for us: ...Read Luke 16:1-13 in MSG translation]

A–Here we have Jesus telling the story of a dishonest businessman who very shrewdly figures out a way to prevent the wrath of his boss by decreasing the debts owed to him.

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

6. And the key to practicing this is actually found at the very beginning of this story, where (in Verse 1) he says that “*There was a rich man who had a... MANAGER...*”

A–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.

B–So Jesus’ point is that if we want to learn how to handle money and possessions *properly*, then it starts with us understanding and recognizing that you and I don’t really “own” *anything* – that *all* we have actually belongs to someone else (God), and that – like the businessman in this story – you and I are merely “Stewards/Managers.”

1–That includes our money, homes, cars, TVs, computers, our other possessions, *as well as* our relationships like our spouse, children, family and friends.

2–Yes, for at least the tangible things, 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?

3–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!

C–That 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. ¹

–III–

7. So then, how does football relate to this at all?

A–Well, in football, the phrase “*In the Pocket*” is used by sports commentators and play-by-play announcers to refer to an area of protection given to a Quarterback by his teammates when he drops back from what’s called the “line of scrimmage” (e.g., the start line) to set up for a pass (e.g., to throw the ball) – he’s referred to as being “*In the pocket*.” ²

B–The theory here is that his teammates will block the opposition from being able to tackle him, forming a safe “pocket” in which the Quarterback can have time to scope out other teammates that he can throw the football to, so that they can take it down field towards the endzone for a touchdown.

C–So think about this: In football, the phrase “*In the Pocket*” has to do with ***protecting the team’s Quarterback so he can give away (e.g., pass) the ball.***

8. Well, let me ask: in the “game” of life, do you “*protect God’s quarter (or dollar, or whatever money you have) so you can keep it for yourself*”? Or like in football, do you “*protect it so that you can (like a Quarterback) give it away*”?

A–You see, my experience has been that too many of us view money and possessions as things that WE *own*, instead of things that we’re merely *stewards* of. And as a result, we tend to hold on to them, instead of giving them away.

B–Another way to say this is that too often, our gifts of time, talents, and money stay “*In the Pocket*”... of our wallet or purse or bank, instead of being “passed” to others – others *like* God’s church who can receive them and use them (like a football) to make a touchdown for God’s team.

C–So, the choice is ours:

1–We can keep/hold back what we have, like an “Owner,” or like a really *bad* Quarterback, holding onto the ball (knowing that if just hoards it to himself, he’s eventually going down!)

2–OR...We can give away what we have, like a “Steward,” or like a *good* Quarterback, passing the ball to his team so that *together* they can score.

3–In fact, the first word of our “*Will You Grow?*” Fall Stewardship focus (the word “*Will...?*”) actually reminds us of this choice.

9. You see, when we choose to view and use our money, possessions and resources as things that ultimately belong to God and not us, then it changes how we view and use them.

A–Not as much of it stays “in the pocket”...

B–...Because we’ve made the choice to be *generous* people – to “pass the ball” (e.g., to offer our gifts to God through His church), enabling God’s team to score!

C–My prayer is that each of us will understand and practice God’s will for us *not* to be *Owners* but *Stewards* of all that we have.

10. [CLOSING PRAYER]

ENDNOTES:

1. 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). In fact, Verse 13 of today’s scripture ends with these words that spell it out very clearly: “*No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one & despise the other. You cannot serve God AND wealth.*”

2. For more information about this phrase, read the article “Football Terminology” (December 06, 2008), online at ww.angelfire.com/ia3/coltsnflrules/terminology.htm.