Chapter 16 is an awkward passage of Luke's gospel

Here's some reasons why...

This first of the two parables, looks on first reading like Jesus is commending dishonesty?? That's awkward

The second parable talks about death... That's awkward...

… And hell? Thats awkward too

The whole chapter has a theme of money and riches running through it? which if you're english, that's awkward as well

And then there is a bit in the middle about divorce and adultery, which not only seems utterly unrelated, but as a topic for discussion is again... Awkward!

There may be other things that will jump out to you too, as we read it together in a moment - but they were my first impressions

So I had to remind myself that I am not to read the bible as an awkward Englishman first and a Christian second

But as a Christian first, and an Englishman second

Therefore what Jesus says is deeply relevant to me ***in spite of*** my english awkwardness

And so what Jesus says here, must be applied to my life as a Christian, who also happens to be english

And what I have discovered this week, is that chapter 16 is not a confusing mish-mash of unrelated topics - actually it does sit together as a unit - it is all related, because the themes of ***money***, and ***how*** we spend it, and ***why***... runs throughout the chapter

I wonder if you recognise the name Countess Carlotte Liebenstein - in her will, she left approx 100million CHF in todays money, to her German Shepherd dog - hard to doubt her affection for her pet, her love for her dog…

And what we will see this morning is that what Jesus teaches us is this… that ***how*** we spend our money… not just once we are dead… but how we spend it while we are alive… how we spend our money in the present… is a test case - it reveals much to us about our relationship with God… our love for Him

Now this parable can seem a little strange at first - so let's take a moment to look at what we know...

Verse 1... Jesus is instructing his disciples... his followers

Teaching them something by way of a parable

So we are told about this dishonest manager who is called before his boss and asked to show him the accounts- to get the books - which it seems will prove he has been dishonest

So he goes home to get them

But it seems he knows that on his return, with the accounts, his guilt in the matter will be proven

So rather than get the books and return immediately to the office, where he will inevitably be fired - our manager takes a bit of a detour on his way back to the office

And he uses what little time he has left to reduce the bills of several debtors, in the hope that they will do him a favour in return when he is looking for a job

... And then he is sacked

... But he is also commended!!!

But he **is not** commended for being dishonest - he **is** commended for acting shrewdly (v8a)

Shrewd can sound quite negative, almost deceptive these days

We might admire someones shrewd business practice - but we certainly wouldn't trust them!

But the word shrewd here is the word for wise - and this is what he is commended for

(Cf matt25v2)

So let me say again, the manager was **not** commended for being dishonest, but for being shrewd, smart, prudent... wise

Even his boss who is now severely out of pocket, must acknowledge the wisdom of his manager's plan.

He still loses his job however… after all he is dishonest!

But given this certain future, this inevitable outcome, he is considered to have acted ***wisely*** to secure the friendship of the debtors who would now look after him in his new unemployed status.

But why did Jesus tell the story?

What are we to learn from it?

I think his point is very simple.

Verse 8 again... ***For*** the people of this world [non Christians] are often much smarter than the children of the light [Christians] are, in preparing now, for a future they anticipate.

The manager was wise because he knew what was coming in the future, and so acted appropriately in the present

Jesus is saying that his disciples are not always so wise - and they should be!

Jesus wants his followers, his disciples, Christian believers... to consider the certain future that awaits us, and to live differently as a result.

And this is my first point this morning...

#1 - Thinking about life in the future leads to wise (and generous) spending in the present

What is this future?

Well it doesn't mean our retirement

Jesus is not talking about pension plans

He is talking about ***beyond*** retirement... he is talking about ***beyond*** the grave!

The future that Jesus is talking about, is being with God, and with God's people forever

This is where we will be in 100 years time if we are followers of Jesus Christ

This is the future that really matters.

And Jesus says we are to act ***differently*** now... ***wisely*** now... on the basis of that certain future to come.

Now it's true that all sorts of different aspects of our behaviour are to change as a result of our future destination

It's perhaps good to ask ourselves... *"what decisions, what actions, what words, would we have done or said differently in the last month, had we acted with our future in mind?"*

But, in verse 9, in words which parallel verse 4 - Jesus focuses on how we use our money.

He says, *"And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.'*

that is to say… the christian is to use their money now, in light of eternity

My bank wrote to me the other day and said this, *"Dear Mr Kearns, If you want financial security when you're older, you'll have to rely on yourself. Even if pension prospects are still positive today, they may look very different in future."*

… and it as accompanied by a picture of a yacht on the lake

my bank only speaks in light of my retirement… Jesus speaks in light of eternity

… the danger is that i listen more to my bank, then Jesus Christ

Now wealth is called ***unrighteous wealth … worldly wealth*** for at least two reasons...

Firstly, it can, as we will see a bit later, distract people and cause them to live only for this world - this is very dangerous

But secondly, money is worldly because it will not be a feature of our heavenly future.

… money ***will*** fail us - it will fail both to satisfy in the present…

… **and** it will fail to provide for our eternal needs

You may have heard the story about the funeral, where someone asks the vicar what the deceased left behind - and he replied, "*everything, they always do*"

It is precisely because we can't take it with us, that Jesus says use it while you can.

But Jesus does not mean we are to just spend it recklessly, as though this life is all there is

"Eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" - ***COMPLETE OPPOSITE!!***

... Rather, Jesus is commending his followers to spend it wisely... Or in the words of vv10-12, in a trustworthy manner… be faithful in how you spend

...To spend it in a way that shows we understand that our resources are a gift from God and we can be trusted to use them wisely

As an aside, to us in our culture - money is a 'big deal' - but Jesus refers to wealth back in verse 10-11 as a 'very little thing'.. a small matter… compared to the riches of heaven

culturally we look at money and see it as offering all we could want… power, choice, freedom.. but for Jesus… it is just a little thing

So what does this wise… faithful… spending look like?

Well verse 9 is the key... Jesus tells us to use our money make friends… so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

What does this mean?

Well it's not about buying your way into heaven.

Just in the previous chapter… we can read about the younger son, remember him, the prodigal one… who wastes everything and so returns home, in the hope of becoming a servant… welcomed with open arms by his loving father

... He brought nothing

... He came seeking mercy, not offering money

Remember that Jesus is talking to his disciples...

... To those who have ***already*** chosen to follow him.

To those who have ***already*** repented and believed

To those who have ***already*** returned to the loving arms of their father in heaven

Jesus is not talking about ***access***, but ***attitude***

So this is not behaviour that ***makes*** you a disciple and hence a citizen of heaven, but behaviour that is appropriate for those who name themselves as disciples of Jesus.

Jesus says we are to use our money, *"to gain friends so that we will be welcomed into heaven."*

So how can the use of our money gain us friends who will welcome us into heaven?

The answer is… using our money in ways which mean that when we enter heaven, people who have benefitted from our generosity will be there to welcome us

I don't know if you ever imagine the welcoming party that will greet you at the gates of heaven.

Who do you think will be in the crowd?

Perhaps the work colleague or family member who you witnessed to over many years?

Perhaps that friend you prayed and prayed and prayed for, until they finally accepted Jesus as their Saviour and LORD.

… And then there will also be the christian worker you supported,

and the christian friend you helped out financially

But there will be others too…

… some you will have never met - like the Christian believer from another country, who because you gave money to a gospel work - they heard the good news and put their trust in Jesus.

And there will be many other people... Many other friends!... waiting to greet you when you enter into heaven!

What great conversations you will have on that day.

Jesus is urging his followers to spend money wisely - to use it as a blessing to others - to be generous with our money...

...NOT because money is how we ***gain*** a relationship with God

... But because how we spend it ***reveals*** our relationship with God

Now for sure, it can be hard to get this right

… the bills need to be paid, and it does us good to take a holiday

But the attitude Jesus commends is simple, even if putting it into practice can be tricky

The story is told about soldiers during the Crusades…

… as they were preparing for battle, they would be baptised with their sword hand out of the water.

The soldiers would march through the water, with the water washing over their heads, but their hands held high out of the water.

Why?… well because they didn't want to baptise the hand that would be used to kill their enemy.

… Everything else had been consecrated and set apart for God, but their hand was their own, to do with as they please.

Is our attitude the same when it comes to our wallets?

Our belief is shown by our behaviour

our creed is shown by our conduct

our friendship with God **is** shown in our finances

So Jesus urges Christians to be wise in how we spend our money

Money is to be spent in the **service** of God, not **served *as*** a god!

For as Jesus says in v13....

Now if we love money, then our reaction to what Jesus says, will be like that of the Pharisees

They ridicule him… they ***sneer*** at what Jesus says, rather then ***submit*** to what Jesus says

And so Jesus in v15 onwards, turns his attention to the Pharisees - and in his words to them there is a warning to us

Because as we will see, 'loving money' does not only mean you hate what Jesus says now… it has eternal consequences too

And this brings me onto my 2nd point...

#2 - Living only for yourself in the present, leads to failure in the future

Jesus has just taught how we cannot love God and love money - we will love one and hate the other

Either we love God, and use the money he gives us in his service, as we look forward to a great welcome in heaven... Or we love money...

And we see from verse 14, the Pharisees love money

So in verse 15 Jesus unpacks how this love of money, rather than God, (remember Jesus says we cannot love both) plays out in the life of the Pharisees

And the warning to us regulars here at Westlake, is that the Pharisees love money, ***but do so*** whilst looking very religious!

Verse 15... They are more concerned with justifying themselves in the eyes of men

... They want to be valued among men

... They seek pats on the back, honour and glory ***now***... Rather than being welcomed into heaven in the future

And so their concern is to be seen to be doing the right thing!

But to do this - here's the thing - to do this they have to distort... Twist...

… Even ignore... God's laws, God's instructions

it seems the pharisees so love money that they are changing the rules… God's rules…

in order to avoid what God says about how we should spend our money

This is why Jesus then talks about the OT - the law and the prophets in vv16-18

Jesus' point is that if you are going to justify yourself in the eyes of men... if you are going to try and convince others, that you are good enough for God… Sooner or later you will need to (v17) "void" certain bits

… '*do away with*' certain bits of God's laws, God's instructions

There will come a time when, if you are going to be seen to be keeping them all - then some of them will need to be 'diluted down'... others may need to disappear completely…

… Bits of the law will need to be 'dropped' altogether

Hence Jesus' words on divorce and adultery... This is not some obscure change of subject... This is one example from Jesus, of how the Pharisees have done this...

... One example of the bits of the law that they have voided…dropped.. avoided!!…

.. And Jesus' point is... you do this sort of thing, if you live only for the here and now, and not in light of the future reality

If you love money, and not God...

If you love what money can offer you now, rather than loving God and serving him with your money now

And such voiding of God's law… Jesus says... is not wise, is not prudent, is not shrewd... But very foolish…

Why?… well for 2 reasons…

Firstly because the Pharisees are in no position to change God's laws...

as Jesus points out… *"it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void."*

Jesus says, *"what do you think you are playing at - thinking **you** can change God's laws?!?"*

And ***secondly*** - God knows their hearts... v15!!

Jesus says, *"Who do you think you are kidding?... Certainly not God!"*

They may be able to fool men, but they cannot fool God!!...

and what's more, God is not impressed... He finds their ways detestable… an abomination

…that is more than just a little "***awkward"***, I think you'll agree!!

So others may look at the Pharisees and esteem them as men who love God

But God knows they love money, and you cannot love both… serve both

So they may look like they are serving God, but they are not... Because they love money...

But here's the thing - Jesus does not stop at exposing their motives!

In the parable which Jesus then tells in verses 19-31, Jesus warns them of the consequences of their foolish ways and how one day it will be too late

Jesus warns them that how they are living in the present… points to where their eternal destiny lies!

Who or what they love in the present, determines their future

And as we will see - choosing to ignore God now, is a very dangerous thing indeed

Which is why Jesus tells this 2nd parable... to warn them… because it is not to late! not for them… and not for us

Let me explain...

This 2nd parable presents 2 people of deeply contrasting means

Yes they share the same postcode… zip code - but that is about it

The inequality between them is obvious for all to see.

Jesus has already described wealth as 'worldly' back in earlier verses

And now we see how it can distract us from obeying God's word and ignoring the world to come... and that is a very dangerous thing indeed

In this 2nd parable, Jesus introduces two very different people. A rich man who seems to have everything and a poor man who seems to have nothing.

Verse 19 tells us *"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day."*

This man had it all.

Designer clothes were in his wardrobe, and only the finest food in his fridge. He was Mr Successful.

He was the complete opposite of the man who slept outside his mansion.

Verse 20. *"And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

Lazarus may have had the same postcode… the same zip code, as the rich man, but his situation was one of utter desperation.

No purple dressing gown or linen boxers for Lazarus.

The only thing covering his body was painful sores.

And while the rich man feasted… this man starved.

And then just when we are thinking to ourselves, *"Surely his situation cannot get any worse"* we are told that even the neighbourhood strays came and licked his sores.

It is a horrible, pitiful scene

One of them seems to have everything, and the other one seems to have nothing.

But then we get to verse 22 where there is a great reversal.

"The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried"

The rich man may have been a "show off" and Lazarus may have been a "right off", but in the end, they both died. Although their lives on the earth were marked by agonising inequality, both of them eventually had to meet their maker.

But, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, death is not the end for anyone. Regardless of who we are, there is a guaranteed future beyond the grave.

So the question is not: ***Will*** *I continue to exist after the doctor tells everybody in the emergency room to stop?*

No, the question is: ***Where*** *will I continue to exist after the doctor tells everybody else to stop?*

Will I be joining Lazarus in heaven or will I be joining the rich man in hell?

And there is no escaping it... the picture Jesus paints of hell is not at all pleasant

IT is only a picture - but it is clear that it is a place of torment, agony, anguish - there is no warm heavenly welcome for this man

Perhaps the obituary of the rich man... financial success etc. And ended with the words, "May he rest in peace"

... But nothing could be further from the truth - he is in great anguish, and what's more, his torment is ***permanent*** - there is no escape - there is a great chasm which no one can cross

So this parable does teach us something about hell, but as a ***deterrent*** - as a ***warning*** - as an encouragement to make the right decisions in this life because they have such an impact on the next!

Jesus does this, to warn the Pharisees

… Because ***they*** are in danger of following in the rich man's footsteps

You see the rich man is presented as a rich **Jew** - we know this because he refers to Abraham as father Abraham

So he is rich and he is Jewish - but he goes to hell

Because in his life he ignored God's commands… Cf. Deut 15 vv7ff…

So Jesus' point is not that rich Jews can't go to heaven - Abraham was 'loaded' back in his day

God is not bothered about people having money - but he is bothered by what they do with it

And so Jesus tells this parable about a rich man who didn't listen to God - it seems his wealth has deafened him to the words of God

And what's more, it sounds like his brothers are deaf too!!

The rich man wants his brothers to be warned so that they repent... Very understandable!

But verse 31 shows us that they already have all they need... Moses and the prophets - the OT - God's word - the bible

And you and I have even more - we have the complete NT including 4 accounts of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The issue then is **not** that the brothers haven't been warned...

... But that they haven't listened

This parable then. Serves as a strong warning to the Pharisees - so busy seeking their own glory that they are ignoring what God has said

... Too busy loving money, rather than loving God

God has told us what to do with money - and whether we believe him is shown by what we do

God has told us about the realities of the future, and whether we believe him is shown by what we do

The problem is not lack of evidence

But our response to what God says

Our attitude to what God says

So as I finish, let me ask you, "Do you love God, or money?"

Jesus tells us we can't love both

If we love money - we will live only for this world - with disastrous consequences

But if we love God then we will love his words - and we will obey his instructions

We will hold lightly to our money in order that we can be generous with it, and bless others... as we look forward to a wonderful welcome in the future