

[Texting Question: **Why do people go to church?**]

There's something most of these responses have in common: they're what we want from Church. Since I'm a pastor, I've never had to church shop (when I look for a new church, I'm always job hunting). But I get to talk to a lot of people who do Church shop, and the overwhelming thread that runs through what people are looking for is "Will this meet my needs?" The music. The preaching. The kids and teens programming.

That's a big part of why many of you are here at Catalyst. This church offers you something different from a lot of other churches you've tried.

And this is a very good thing. Who would argue that?

But what if there's more? What if the Church could be more than a place you get? What if this church were actually a place you could *give* too? What if the way we do church - looking at it primarily as a place to get, to consume, to receive, what if that's only the beginning? What if there's more beyond that?

What if, when it comes to church shopping, you asked, "Does this church meet my needs best?", but then you also asked, "Is this church a place where I can serve the best?" (Apologies to JFK for the indirect rip off.)

What if we became more than spiritual consumers? What if we became spiritual contributors?

[**Consumer/Few**] That would radically change how we see Church. In the consumer model, only a few people actually give. I get to (since I work for the Church). So does Sprang. And so do a few other people - our band, the awesome tech crew. Our coffee and hospitality crew. The volunteers in the Lab.

But the rest of us... we're here. And it's pretty passive. You sing along, you listen. You shake a few hands. You receive.

[**Side-by-Side: Contributor/Many**] What if we could blow up that picture of Church, expand it outside this hour, this space? What if this time we're together became just the tip of the iceberg, the icing on the cake of a faith that's all the time, every day? What if every person who's part of Catalyst were contributing to what God is doing here in Dallas, in Rowlett, through Catalyst?

What if Catalyst were more than the few? What if Catalyst were the many, the place where every person who joins us understands they're here for a reason, to consume sure, but to *contribute* too?

I know what you're thinking... you're thinking, But I don't *have* anything. I'm spiritually immature. Or I have a past. Or I'm not as qualified as the people I see leading me. Or I'm too busy.

We have a thousand different excuses. But I want to investigate a strange little parable today. During this series, which we're calling "You Had to Be There", we're listening to Jesus' parables with a new spin on them. Jesus used stories to communicate a lot of his teachings. He pulled real life, everyday examples from the world of his listeners.

And we've seen how that makes it hard for us today to connect to Jesus' stories. We don't live in a world of pearl merchants and shepherds. We live in a world of flea markets and school field trips and Hollywood. So when we hear Jesus' stories, we often miss the emotional punch the stories are meant to have. As we've said before, hearing a sermon on a parable is a bit like having to explain a joke - by the time you get it, it's not funny anymore. So we've been following a book called *The First Time We Saw Him*, by my friend Matt Mikalatos. In that book, Matt asks what Jesus' stories would sound like if Jesus had come today, instead of to Palestine 2000 years ago.

Today I want to look with you at a story Matt doesn't include in his book. It's one of the strangest of the parables Jesus tells, even after you understand what he means. The original story is found in Luke 16. It's the very next thing that happens after the story of Frank the Prodigal Son and his Jerk Older Brother we explored last week.

Since Matt didn't update this story, we took it upon ourselves to follow his example. So sit back, imagine you're one of those first people to follow Jesus, and he told you this story, about a stockbroker named Gary:

Gary read the email again for the hundredth time: *Mr. Fox, My office. First thing tomorrow morning. It was signed Francis Copperman, Senior Broker -- Stratton Oakmont. Gary's eyes flitted across the dozens of cramped cubicles on the 50th-floor toward the double-glass doors that marked the threshold to Mr. Copperman's palatial office suite. Nobody saw Mr. Copperman.*

Unless today was his last day at work. That's all this email could mean. Tomorrow, Mr. Copperman was going to fire him, first thing in the morning. As his panic began to subside, Gary started thinking. He'd know this day was coming - he wasn't exactly the hardest worker on the floor. In fact, to be honest, he did quite a bit less than the minimum required to stay employed. Doing the minimum or less had been Gary's MO his whole life - he relied on his charm to get by, and for a while, it had seemed that charm was good enough here at Stratton Oakmont, too.

But if there's one thing Mr. Copperman liked more than charm, it was money, and Gary hadn't been bringing in nearly enough. He had to think fast - the floor closes in two hours, and after that, he's effectively toast.

Gary picked up his phone and put his charm to work. After about an hour of calling in favors, he turned to buying and selling stocks, making not-strictly-legal trades for his wealthiest clients. When the floor closed, Gary went home.

The next morning, in his best suit, he waited in Mr. Copperman's outer office while the assistant expertly ignored his existence. At some indiscernible signal, she announced, without looking up, that Mr. Copperman would see him now, and buzzed him in.

Mr. Copperman was lounging - that's really the only word Gary could think of to describe his demeanor - in an enormous leather throne behind his equally enormous oak desk. To Gary's surprise, he was grinning - not the treatment Stratton Oakmont employees received when they were fired. Every employee had heard Mr. Copperman's shouts and swears when someone was "invited to pursue other avenues of employment", as the management disingenuously put it.

Without getting up - and without offering Gary a seat, Francis Copperman smirked, "Congratulations, kid. I'm impressed."

Gary was thoroughly confused. He knew full well what he had done. So why was Mr. Copperman... happy? Impressed? Gary decided feigning ignorance was his best bet. He stammered, "Um... what do you mean, Mr. Copperman?"

"Don't play dumb, kid. You're lazy. You're a cheat. But you're not dumb. I sent you the termination email yesterday, and this morning I have your seven top clients gushing over all the money you made them, and a little confused where it all came from. Since not one of them authorized any transactions."

"Um...", still confused, Gary decided to keep up the innocence routine. "Happy clients are good, right, sir?"

"Cut the crap, kid. Rich clients are good. Dumb clients are good. Rich, dumb clients are even better. But you know what kind of clients are best, don't you: Grateful clients."

"So yesterday, you get the "you're canned" email. And you don't freak out. You don't cry. You don't beg. My guess is you called in some of your favors. Got some insider information. And put it to work for your clients. What they don't know won't hurt them, am I right? All they know is, they wake up several million dollars richer, and who do they have to thank? You, the laziest broker I've ever seen."

And of course you know I won't raise a stink about a little insider trading from one worthless broker, because I don't want the feds poking around here too closely."

"Real smart, kid. A work ethic like that, it'll take you far in this town."

More confused than ever, Gary asked, "So I'm not fired?"

Copperman laughed, "Don't kid yourself. You're done here at Stratton Oakmont. But you'll land on your feet. Once word gets out you left here, you'll have job offers lined up down the block - several from those clients you just made even richer."

Copperman stood up and extended his hand, "Nicely done, kid. I'm sure I'll be seeing you. Now get out."

Jesus let his followers take the story in. He said, "The people like Gary in this world use everything at their disposal to get what they want. Frankly, they're much better at getting what they want than God's people are. So here's the takeaway: Use the resources you have in this world - all of them – to work for justice and help other people flourish. Then, when you've used up everything you have, you'll find them welcoming you into an eternal home."

Okay. Let's pause for a moment and acknowledge that this story is super jacked-up. We get it - a lazy guy who's not afraid to cut corners is working for a boss who's not the most upstanding guy either. And when the lazy guy is about to get fired, he cheats his boss, who then commends him.

But then Jesus says... you should be at least as clever as Gary.

What?!

Gary is the hero we're supposed to emulate?!

I have to admit... I did *not* see that coming. So what's going on here?

A key observation will help us see what Jesus is doing, and how we are supposed to be like Gary. First, remember that I mentioned this parable follows immediately on the heels of the story of the Prodigal Son? That's important, because there's a linguistic link between the stories as well.

Check out how Jesus describes the Prodigal Son (who in our story last week was Frank who went to Hollywood):

*This younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. -- Luke 15:13*

The Prodigal "wasted all his money". That's actually what the word "prodigal" means - wasteful (I always thought it meant "missing" or "estranged" because of this story. But it actually means a person is wasteful!).

Now, look at how Jesus starts his story of the shady manager (the guy I called Gary):

*One day a report came that the manager was wasting his employer's money. -- Luke 16:1 [Let's have this on the same slide so we can see the side-by-side of the language]*

Just like in English, those two Greek words are the same. Luke wants us to see that Gary and Frank are the same kind of person. They're both prodigal, wasteful. They're both using their resources in ways that don't last.

And, in Gary's parable, that's what Jesus condemns. Not *having* resources, as though wealth itself is evil, as though there's something inherently more pure and holy about being poor and needy. No, what Jesus condemns is the squandering. The wastefulness.

Jesus is saying, Look: you all have resources. Some may have a lot. Others obviously have less. But everyone has *some*. You've been given opportunity and means. Are you making the most of them?

Because guys like Gary are. Jesus calls it right: when the chips are down, the Garys of the world do whatever they must to seize and capitalize on the opportunities they find. They're using *everything* at their disposal to make the world the way they want it to be.

Too often, Christians don't. We get it in our heads that money is evil, that having stuff is wrong, that using what we have to advance the kingdom is bad.

But God never said money was evil... what we find in the Scriptures is that the *love* of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Money is a tool.

Would you build a house without a hammer? Without saws? Of course not. Those tools exist because they make the work of building easier.

In the same way, God does not invite us to be a part of bringing about his rule here on Earth as it is in Heaven and then leave us unequipped. God doesn't send us out empty-handed and just wish us luck.

God equips us. God gives us the tools we need to be about the work of kingdom-building.

Of course falling in love with the tools is silly. If someone told you they were a contractor, invited you to see what they'd built, and then showed you a house full of room after room of hammers, you'd be creeped out. In the same way, it's possible for us to get infatuated with the *tools* and forget the mission.

But that doesn't mean there's anything wrong with the tools.

Now: some of you are beginning to shift uncomfortably. Because this sounds like a money sermon. And you know how churches *love* to talk about money.

Let me set your mind at ease: God absolutely cares about your money. Because God absolutely cares about every aspect of your life.

But I want to frame money as one resource among many God has given you. You have time. You have energy, skills. Talents and passions. Relationships.

You have so much. And the question is: how are you utilizing them?

Are you using what God has given you to bring about God's kingdom, God's rule, God's way, here on Earth?

(Some of us are going... uh... I honestly don't understand the question. It sounds like a bunch of flowery, spiritual language to me.)

So let me make it a little more concrete for you. In the book of Galatians, Paul lists the fruit of a life following God. Essentially, he tells the Galatians that if they follow God, their lives begin to look more and more like this. Here's how he describes that life:

**The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. -- Galatians 5:22-23**

How loving does your life look? How peaceful? How patient? How kind? How generous? How faithful and gentle? How self-controlled?

[**Maybe a picture of various aspects of our life, with "Spiritual" being one small part, the others greyed out**] If we're going to talk about bringing God's way to Earth as it is in Heaven, let's start in our own lives. Most of us look at this list and think, Okay. Basically I need to be more Spiritual. So I need to go to Church more. Or read my bible more. Or pray more.

We don't realize God has filled our lives with resources that point us toward this life, if we'll realize it.

[**Here "marriage" could be lit up as well**] Do you realize your marriage is an opportunity for you to become more like Jesus? That doesn't sound so romantic: Let's use our spouses to become more spiritual.

But consider: your spouse presents you every day with the opportunity to put what they want ahead of what you want. That's how Jesus defines love for us - giving ourselves up for our beloved. That means every day, your spouse gives you the chance to be more loving.

[Children lights up] Do you realize your children are a opportunity for you to become more like Jesus? Or does someone out there want to tell me that parenting isn't a good place for you to cultivate patience in your life?

[Maybe a FB icon light up] Do you realize Facebook presents you with all kinds of chances to practice peace-making and kindness? (Just scroll on past that status, man! Or maybe don't post that inflammatory picture... you're not changing any minds!)

Do you realize that Catalyst presents you with all kinds of opportunities to practice generosity - with your time, your money, your abilities. No matter what you're good at, there's a way to use it here, to be a part of what God is doing in Rowlett through Catalyst.

[The other icons light up, so they're all lighted] And we could talk about your workplace. Your friend groups. Your hobbies. Your dreams.

Catalyst, you are rich. God has given you so much, and it's all to help you look more like Jesus. It's all so that you can be a part of establishing God's rule here on earth as it is in Heaven.

That begins with you and me, and it spreads out (as we'll see in a couple of weeks).

Today is a wake-up call. It's a call to recognize how much we really do have. How much God has given us.

It's a call to refuse to be like Gary, like Frank the prodigal. Not to waste our resources, to squander what God has given us.

So will you step up? Will you be part of a Catalyst that isn't content to let a few use what they've been given? Will you refuse only to consume?

Will you instead choose today to contribute to what God is doing in Rowlett through Catalyst? Will you choose to use whatever you've been given to allow God to transform you, to seek out opportunities to be more loving, more joyful, more peaceful, more patient, kind and generous, more faithful, gentle and self-controlled?

Let's not be a church of Prodigal Franks. We know the Garys of the world are doing whatever they can to build their own kingdoms. Let us be a church full of people who are sly like foxes, who will do whatever it takes, use whatever resources God has given us to bring about God's kingdom here on Earth as it is in Heaven.

### **Prayer of Examine**

1. When in the last week have you felt the clear about who you are?
2. When in the last week have you felt unsure about your life or direction?
3. What resources has God given you?

4. How can you invest in God's kingdom this week?