

Series: *BLING!...BLING!* February 25, 2007

**FIVE SECONDS AFTER YOU DIE
Luke 16; Matthew 25**

I. INTRO

- A. Several weeks ago, I bought more bread and hamburger buns than we needed, so I thought, “Hey—it’s cold in the garage—why not put them there to keep them from getting moldy?” When it came time to use them, our son Matt brought in the loaf of bread—and a huge hunk was missing right out of the top. Upon closer inspection, there was a little hole eaten right through the plastic wrapper. Matt said, “Duuuh! Dad! You **know** we have mice in the garage! Why did you put it out there?” I checked the hamburger buns—same M.O.
-I thought, “You’ve messed with the big K.D. for the last time!” By the way, that doesn’t stand for Kraft Dinner! So, I found my mousetrap, loaded it with peanut butter—**WHAM!** Got the little raider! And, so far, five of his brothers and sisters have also...met the Lord! There’s so many--I’m surprised they didn’t carry off the van.
- B. Fortunately, mice are dumb. They see peanut butter in a trap—they don’t think, “Hmmm! I saw Flora Mae in that thing yesterday—her eyes bugging right out. Maybe peanut butter isn’t such a good idea! Maybe I could exercise **delayed gratification!**” Nope, they don’t think like that. Like the bugs in **A BUG’S LIFE**, “Stay away from the light!” “I can’t help it—**it’s so beautiful! Zzzzzt!**”
1. But “humans are smarter than that,” right? We see the detours—with signs, flashing lights, “Come here! Try this! You’ll like it! It’s cool!”—but we **know** better! After all—we’ve got bigger brains; powers of discernment! We **think** before we jump!”
-Well, you’d **think** so—but it ain’t necessarily so.
 2. The Bible gives all kinds of warnings about the traps in life. It says, “**Think** about the future! **Think** about the future, about what you build, about what you plant, about what you invest!” And a **lot** of the warnings, are about making money and success the primary motivating factor in your life. Why? Because if you chase that stuff, you will most likely miss or show contempt for the most obvious label on life. There’s an expiration date. It’s written on almost every tombstone.
 3. You can handle life and money **really** well—in a way that’s purposeful and meaningful and leads to joy. Or you can handle it in a way that brings immense regret. In fact, Jesus said you can **lose** your soul if you’re not careful. Money has the potential to do tremendous good in our hands—or wreak havoc and destroy not just us, but the people we love.
 4. What I want to do today, if nothing else, is just have you and I play out some of these paths to the end so we at least understand the traps a little better—and make some adjustments if we need to. Okay?

II. THE MOST OBVIOUS TRAP: *DETOURS!*

- A. Life, I believe, is like a trip. It’s this road we travel on every day until we get to our destination. And we’re either on the right road—or we’re on a detour. When I’m traveling and see a detour sign, my first thought is, “Oh no! This is going to take a **lot** longer than I’d planned!” Detours in life don’t just cost you time, they can cost you everything that matters.

1. The problem in life is, to continue the analogy—it's not the *right* road that gets the most press—it's the detours. Detours always seem to have these glitzy signs and flashing light. **Hey, over here! Lookit me! No, over here—choose me!** -And they're **very** seductive. They appeal to some very natural desires in us. Curiosity. The desire to escape a bad situation—or just plain old boredom. They appeal to our sex drive, our desires for pleasure, for food, for significance. And, truth is, they appear to be short cuts. An easy way to get what we want—to be noticed, loved, admired, sought out--rather than the old-fashioned way of hard work, time and character.
 2. Let me say it clearly; **all detours are traps!** What we **really** want and **need** most is on the right road—not the detour. But we're like mice drawn to peanut butter in a trap. It smells good, seems right, makes us salivate—and **so close**—we find it hard to tell the difference between food and **bait**. By the way, for you non-fisherpersons out there—**bait** is food--with a hook in it!
-When people start down a detour, they don't think about where that road will take them. The Marlboro Man never thought he'd be riding a horse with an oxygen tank strapped to it. The guy on the fast track to success at the top of the ladder never thought he'd find himself alone in a big empty house.
 3. I personally believe that money is the most deceptive of all the detours. I'll tell you why; in a world like ours, people think money madness is normal.
*Anyone here ever seen a credit card with a warning on it; "Too much use could put your whole family at serious risk." I get new offers for credit cards all the time. I've **never** seen one that says, "Do not open if you are currently struggling with consumer debt."
-Car salespersons never say, "I know the payments are appealing—but you have to ask yourself if the smell of "new" is worth carrying a payment book the size of an encyclopedia."
 4. So...we have to self-monitor. We have to be **really** careful who we believe. Detours take you further and further and further away from **where you want and need to be!** And the further you go down a detour—the harder it is to come back.
- B. Money/wealth/prosperity has been a trap for God's people throughout the whole biblical record. If you read the O.T., you'll find that greed and the desire for prosperity was precisely what led them into serving pagan gods and mistreating the poor—and eventually to their judgment.
-Jesus knew that if His Kingdom was going to break out of this rut, He was going to have to let people peek behind the curtain and **see** the other side. They would have to know the profound wisdom of staying on the right road—and contrast it with the cliff at the end of most detours. So, he told stories.
1. He told stories about investment. Like the story about a businessman who went on a trip and entrusted his fortune into the hands of three of his managers. Anyone remember the story? I mean, these guys were given a remarkable amount of money. One about 5 million, another 2 million and the third, 1 million. Two invested and doubled the money. The third buried it in the back yard. Did nothing. Jesus was teaching that God owns, we manage—and we are accountable! The Master's coming back—and we will have a final interview with him about what we've done with **his** resources. **God owns; we manage.**
-Now, how many of you think this third guy with the wasted opportunity might've made different choices if he could've **peeked behind the curtain?**

2. Now, Jesus told a **lot** of stories—but let me give you one more. I told this one a couple of weeks ago. It's about the rich man and Lazarus. This rich man—in our culture—would be someone like Bill Gates, or Donald Trump, or Ted Turner. Some people are very wealthy—and hide it. Not this guy. His philosophy was, "I've got it, **flaunt it!**" He's this **mega-Bling** guy whose wealth is advertised all over his life—from his silk boxers to his purple robes to his ostentatious mansion to his parties for the rich and famous. Man, you shoulda **seen** his parties—and it's not hard, cause there's one every day.
- But he had a gate—you know, to keep the strays and riff-raff out. And he had a big servant there who carried an Uzi and knew Kung-Fu, Judo and Tae Kwon Do—just to make sure none of the uninvited got in.
 - The big surprise comes five seconds after they both die. Lazarus, the poor, sick guy who was laid by his gate every day to eat the crumbs from his table gets carried to the side of Abraham—which implies that he will be a part of the best party you can imagine—forever. The rich man also dies and his body gets buried—but he ends up in fully conscious in Hades—or hell—aware that his state, too, will be unchanged for eternity.
 - As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago. The dialogue between Abraham and the rich guy reveals this huge chasm that he had been building all his life. And when he died—he's still arrogant; still thinks he's better than Lazarus and knows more than Abraham.
 - Do you think that if this rich guy had had a peek behind the curtain, things would've been different? That he would've realized that his money didn't put him in the winner's circle like he thought it did? Think, instead, he would've lived with humility as a kind-hearted, generous person? Funny, Abraham apparently doesn't think so. This guy says, "This is awful! Send Lazarus back to tell my brothers about this place!" Abraham says, "No. I don't think someone rising from the dead to give a peek behind the curtain will change a thing."
- a. Jesus teaches us in this story that money, when it gets into your heart, can make you hard, arrogant and insulated from the people you **need** to be close to.
 - b. These barriers don't just keep people you consider less desirable out—they keep God out—cause, see, He loves to hang with the poor, the broken and the marginalized. Your gate becomes the locked door in your prison.
 - c. Now, I realize this is just a story, but it aligns with some other things Jesus says about the next life.
 - *Five seconds after you and I die, we will be **wide awake!** No kidding. We have an eternal soul—and death is simply the entry point into eternity.
 - *Secondly, five seconds after we die, we will either be filled with gratitude, or unbelievable regret. It will be crystal clear that life is **not** about money, stuff and popularity. It's about others.
 - *Third, five seconds after you and I die, we will be able to reflect back on our life here on earth with crystal clarity. We will remember in exact detail the detours we either took or stayed off of—and the opportunities we either maximized—or totally missed.
- C. Friends, the truth of what Jesus taught is **incredibly** sobering. If you believe that Jesus was God—and I believe He was, and if you believe that he told us to **truth**—and I believe He did, then what He said needs to be a reality check for us. We need to somehow neutralize the boatload of lies we've been told. You've heard them: "Make as much as

you can; it's all yours; stockpile it, flaunt it, play with it"—and **realize** that all we have belongs to God—and He's lovingly **placed** it in our hands so we can make a **difference in the world!**

-What Jesus taught is **our** peek behind the curtain! This truth is intended, **not** to make us feel guilty because we have a lot—but to be filled with joy and vision for our future because we really, more than most people in this world, have a chance to make a difference! We do! We can! But we have to keep the windows clean. Let me explain.

1. Jesus gave an overall broad principle that He said would help us make **really** good decisions. It summarized everything the Bible has to say about everything. Anyone remember what it was? **Love God. Love others.** Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.

-Paul took this principle and played it out even further. In 1 Cor. 13, he makes it clear that love is the main thing in **every** arena. He said that you can do astounding **spiritual** things that help people and get you known as a spiritual giant—you can even give everything you have to the poor and die as a martyr for Jesus. But if it's not motivated by a genuine **love** for God or others--it's just noise. It's **nothing**.

2. Look at every teaching of Jesus—and the Bible—on this issue of money, and **love** is always at the core of making good decisions in how to use it well. Not just love for **yourself, your family and your good friends**. That's easy! We do that all the time. It's about loving God and others.

-We **need** help, because in this life, everything gets fuzzy. After communicating this love principle, the Apostle Paul made this comment:

When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:11-13 NLT).

3. I don't know about you, but I don't see things very clearly in this life. I get fooled. Sometimes I think something is food—but it's actually **bait**.

Anyone ever taken the bait and made a dumb decision that made you feel like an idiot? I sure have! So, you **and I need a plumbline—a level—a compass—a gyroscope** so that we can finish life right side up!

III. THE MOST OBVIOUS TRUTH: **DEATH!**

A. There was a cemetery close to our seminary apartment in Kentucky. Occasionally, on a nice day, Lori and I would take a walk through it. You can tell we didn't have much to do! Have you ever looked at what some people put on tombstones? Some **very** interesting—and some very **weird** things! **Ripley's Believe It Or Not** has a collection of strange epitaphs. Let me read a couple:

*There's one in Uniontown, PA that reads, **Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake. He stepped on the gas instead of the brake!**

*There's a tombstone in Thurmont, Maryland that reads: **Here lies an atheist. All dressed up and no place to go!**

*Or, the epitaph of a hypochondriac: **I told you I was sick!**

*There's one from Wetumpka, Alabama, that says, **Solomon Pease. Pease is not here, only the pod. He shelled out and went home to God!**

1. Every tombstone has one thing in common. Two dates—and a dash between them. For most of you, that first date has already been determined. Anyone who doesn't have one? And there will be a second date for us all—hopefully not for a long, long time! Anyone know what the most important part of the grave marker is? It's the **dash**.
 -See, the **dash** represents what you actually do with your life. If you love with your dash—love God, love others—I can guarantee you that you will use it well. But if you try to goldplate your dash—and your life becomes about you and your stuff and your security—you'll end up same as one of the people in Jesus' stories.
2. Sometimes, see, tombstones lie. Tombstones, obituaries, biographies are all written from the perspective of **the world system**—just the way most people think.
 *According to the world system we live in, the rich man Jesus contrasted with Lazarus would've been a star of **People** magazine, **The Toronto Star**, **Forbes**, **The New York Times**, **Money** magazine. His income, investments, wealth and lifestyle would've been regularly written up for people to drool over, envy, try to emulate. He probably would've had his life featured on **Biography** and **Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous**. His parties, by invitation only, would've been the envy of Hollywood—stars dreaming that one day **they** would be invited to one—if nothing else, just to see the inside of his mansion. Even though this guy totally and thoroughly ignored the poor, the sick—**nothings**—outside his gated community; even though his arrogance and superiority offended God and sent him to Hell, in **our** world—he was a big shot.
 *Remember the story Jesus told about the rich farmer whose land produced bumper crops? How, in a culture where many, many starved, he had this conversation with himself—trying to solve the problem of exactly what to do with all this food? Then he died. John Ortberg writes about what that might've looked like in our culture.
 -“His death is a major story in the financial community. ...When they had his memorial service, the whole community showed up, filed past him, and said the same stupid thing people always say at funerals, ‘He looks so peaceful.’ Rigor mortis will do that to a person.
 -Then they had a chunk of marble inscribed with all these inspiring words that described his life: entrepreneur, innovator, leader, visionary, success. They buried him, put up the monument, and then they all went home.
 -Later, when it was dark the angel of God walked through the eerie silence of this cemetery—unseen, unheard. He made his way over to this man's grave and there he traced with his finger on this splendid monument the single word that God chose to summarize the meaning of this man's life. Know what that word was? Fool. “**You fool**,” God said.

 -And the question is why? Why would Jesus use such strong language? Jesus is not mocking him--He is simply making a tragic but accurate diagnosis. That for all this man's entrepreneurial skill, his ability to ...anticipate every possible contingency, there was one scenario he'd totally forgotten. That **everyone has an expiration date**. The death rate seems to always hover at around 100% mark. ‘So, what other word,’ asks Jesus, ‘can you apply to such irrational behavior—to a man so busy building up his little kingdom that he has no time for the Kingdom of God.’”

3. There are two illusions, friends, that prop up the life of a fool. The first is contained in the phrase, “When things settle down.” Things don’t just automatically change in your life so that one day you have time to do the things that really matter. Life only settles down when you die. And then they settle **right down!** It’s amazing.

-The second illusion is this: That someday **more** will be **enough**. And that’s absolutely not true. More is never enough. **Enough** is a moving target. So God offers something better. The Apostle Paul urges Timothy—and **all** pastors, me included, to be straight with their people about money. It’s quite blunt. Do you want to hear it? This is what he said:

Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can’t take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have *enough* food and clothing, let us be content.

But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows...

Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money *to do good*. They should be *rich in good works* and *generous to those in need*, always being ready to *share with others*. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life (1 Tim. 6:6-10; 17-19 NLT).

- B. Remember, what the Bible teaches about death? Five seconds after you die, you will be **wide awake**. Five seconds after you die, you will either be filled with gratitude or unbelievable regret. And five seconds after you die, you will be able to reflect back on your life here on earth with crystal clarity.

-What do **you** want that to look like? See, in a lot of ways, you and I don’t choose what happens in this life. But we are **directly and totally** responsible for what happens in the next. What you build in this life will either last forever--or be lost forever. You choose. No one scams the system. No one.

1. According to what the Bible says, there are three possible scenarios you and I can face.

a. We’ve talked at length about the first scenario. Jesus said that a person can gain the world—and lose their soul. That’s what happened to the rich guy in the story with Lazarus. Now, please understand—he didn’t lose his soul because he was rich. Abraham, the patriarch who cradled Lazarus was one of the wealthiest people of his day. But he had the **order** right; God first, money and everything else second.

-There are a lot of people in our world who are in the news or the gossip columns or on Entertainment Tonight who—unless things change—will have made quite a splash in this life—but will totally fade into isolation and

insignificance in the next. My personal opinion? I don't think that's a good deal.

- b. So, what if you know Jesus as your forgiver—but never follow His leadership and basically live your life for money and success? That happens, doesn't it? Yes—it does. 1 Cor. 3 says this about where that leads:

...Their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames (1 Cor.3:13-15 TNIV). Personally, I don't think that's a good deal either. You still get cheated in this life and the next.

- c. But there is a much better path. It's the one God always intended that we follow. It's the path of love.

It's the path of seeing beyond the curtain of this life—and seeing things as they *really* are. It's where you and everything you have truly belongs to Jesus—where you are His servant, and all you have has been devoted to loving Him and loving others.

2. So. What will you want to have done with your dash—the most important space on your tombstone?

-Let me tell you what I want. I want to live life to the full. I want to live with contentment—be filled with joy—to make sacrifices where they really count—and finish well, knowing that I loved the One who gave his life for me.

-When I step onto that other shore some day, I want Jesus to look me in the eye and say, "Well done! Good job! You've been faithful with a little—and now you'll get a chance to be faithful with a lot. Now I want to introduce you to those whose lives have been changed because you gave!" That's what I want.

3. I want you to think about your life. It's pretty unproductive to talk about having just 6 months left, or one year left. What do you want the rest of your life to look like? You probably have some dreams about mountain climbing or going on a cruise, or catching a 30 pike or catching the ultimate wave.

- But beyond the *events*, what's the bigger picture?

What will you want to have *done*—*accomplished*? Will it be enough if you just get the big house, the big car, the big job, the big account? Will *bigger*, or *better* really do it for you? Or is there something deeper inside your soul that will want to have accomplished God's mission, God's purpose for you--what you were *created* for? I'd be really *really* surprised if all God ever designed you for is *bigger*. I think He designed you for eternal impact; for somehow changing people's lives—*somewhere!*

-And **what will you want to have been *known for*?** That you were a rowdy, good-time guy or girl who laughed a lot and had a lot of friends? Or would you want to be known as a head-down, work-first, make-it-happen person who never really took a lot of time to smell the roses but, dog-gone-it—*produced!* My guess is that most of us would like to be known as someone with a heart. Someone who loved; who cared; who lived with distinction—and power.

-**What will you wish had rubbed off on others from your life?** Will it be enough if people got your sense of humor, your enjoyment of a great meal, or your solid work ethic? How about *love*. For me? I know people won't remember a word of

these talks I give—but I pray that the love and power of the Spirit behind them will leave a lasting impact.

-What legacy will you wish you had left your kids, whether you have them, or hope to some day? History's clear about one thing; leaving them a pile of money isn't even good for them! My guess is that you will want them to remember you as someone who genuinely loved God and others; that **love** was the driving force behind your life.

4. Dream with me a little about your life. What if **five seconds after you die**, you are met by a crowd of people **you** touched and influenced with every facet of your life—including your money? What if the way you used your money **transformed** people's lives? That could happen, you know. If you were to get real strategic and wise about how you invested your time and resources—you could actually cut a swath of love through the people on this planet. And your influence could keep growing **after** you die—and move right through history until God finally wraps everything up. **That could happen!**

-Think of how many people one person touches in their lifetime. If you invest in a person's future—you invest in the futures of everyone they touch. You've heard the word exponential? Like, if you fold a piece of paper on half 40 times—it will reach from here to the moon? That, friends, is **exactly** what Jesus is talking about when he tells us to store our treasure in **Heaven**. What's in Heaven? **People!** When everything else gets burned off the face of this planet, that's **all** that will be left! And we've got **one shot** at it!

-And that's what Jesus made clear in one of the last stories he ever told—**desperately** trying to help us see behind the curtain. It's about the final judgment—and the separation of people into one of two groups. Those who saw people in need—and lovingly gave them clean water, food, clothing, shelter and comfort. Jesus' final comment is,

'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!' ...When you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me (Matt. 25:40, 45 NLT).'

4. Where are you at right now? Are you okay with your investment in others? If not—what decisions will you make to change that?

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. I consider myself one of the most fortunate people on this planet because I had this kind of value system lived out in front of me most of my life. It was in the life of my Dad. Please don't mistake what I'm saying as me glorifying my Dad in death beyond what he was in life. He was an ordinary flawed man. But his life permanently changed mine.
- My Dad would have probably been considered naïve and short-sighted by most financial planners. He never really gave much thought to the future. To my knowledge, he never balanced the cheque-book, saved, or laid out a budget. If that got done, my Mom did it. I don't think he and my Mom even started saving for retirement until they were in their early 60s. And I'm not advocating that. When it came time to pay the funeral expenses—it turned out that the \$10,000 life insurance policy they had only had \$2500 in it.
- But he got generosity right. And he got faith right. All his life he kindly, lovingly, and generously invested in others. He lived well, had fun, and made a difference. He worked as a pastor almost to his 80th birthday—yes, partially because he needed to, living in an apartment attached to the back of the church, making about \$350 a week. But mostly

because he loved what he did. His favorite expression was, “God will provide.” I got a little tired of him saying that—but God did.

-In retirement, they were able to afford a double-wide trailer. And every day he was in it, he woke up—looked around, and said, “Isn’t this a beautiful house? Isn’t God good?” I worried about whether they would have enough—I mean, if my Mom lived to be as old as her mother—she’d hit 96! But God knew what they would need. Unless God intervenes—it looks like I’ll lose my mother within the year. And God gave them **all** they needed. With 55 years of ministry, plus starting a number of youth camps, where, over the years, probably thousands of kids have attended—there will be quite a crowd there in Heaven, ultimately, to greet them. That’s the legacy he left me. Five seconds after he died—that’s what he saw.

- B. To be honest, that’s all I really want—when it comes right down to it. What do **you** want? Are you on a road that will lead to this immense reward for how you’ve lived, for how you’ve invested in what God treasures most—people. Or are you on road to regret. That can change, you know. You can **invest wisely!** You could leave the detour right now. -John Deacon sent me a note—and talked about the power of a whole group of people choosing, together, to live on less—so they can invest in what counts. So that the peer pressure goes in a **good** direction—and generosity just becomes **the way most people think here**. I want us **all** to be deeply invested in the Jesus’ revolution that will sweep this world with love. Remember, we follow and serve One who died with his hands nailed open.