



Luke 16:1-13
Wise Stewardship

NKJ Luke 16:1 He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods.

2 "So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'

3 "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg.

4 'I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'

5 "So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

6 "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'

7 "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'

8 "So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.

11 "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

12 "And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?"

13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

If after reading this parable you find yourself still wondering what exactly Jesus is teaching you here, don't feel bad. Even commentators on the bible will freely admit that this is the most difficult to understand of all of Christ's parables and perhaps the most easily misinterpreted of all of them. For a Pastor preaching through Luke, as I am, the beginning of chapter 16 presents you with kind of an expository speed bump. You go from being thrilled with the three parables of God's amazing grace in seeking and saving the lost – the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, to a difficult parable about an unrighteous steward.

But fear not, while it is difficult to understand this parable, it is not impossible. Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit not only to be a comforter, but to give his children "*eyes to see and ears to hear*" when it comes to scripture, so with His indispensable help, let's try to mine the riches of His instruction here.

In this parable, Jesus is telling us a story about the manager of a rich man's property. The manager we learn is accused of wasting his managers goods. The word translated "wasting" in verse 1 is *diaskorpizo*, I mention that because it's the same word Jesus used in chapter 15 verse 13 of the way the prodigal son *wasted* his father's goods. The idea isn't that the manager or steward is directly stealing from his employer – he would have brought up on charges in that case – its more likely that he was lazy and/or incompetent and his master's estate was suffering because of it.

He's kind of like the middle manager or officer who just doesn't care enough to do a good job, and who just skates by until finally someone realizes he isn't pulling his weight and that the organization is suffering because of it.

Finally, his employer gets word that the manager is doing an awful job taking care of his business, and so he resolves to fire him, but first he says, "get your books in order, so that I might know exactly how things stand and so that the man who takes over your job will know what needs to be done."

So the steward is thinking, "Well I've blown my good thing here. What can I do? I'm not going to go do manual labor, and I'm too proud to beg." So he comes up with a plan to make sure that when he is kicked out of his living, he'll have a lot of people who will owe him favors. Perhaps one of them will put him up, or employ him themselves. [Unfortunately, this kind of thing sometimes goes on in the government, where government workers will, so to speak, prepare to enter the business world by using government contracts or perks for companies they hope to work for.]

So he calls on the people who owe his master money, his master is probably a wealthy landowner, and these were his tenants who paid with a share of the crops they grew. We are only given two examples by Jesus, but the implication is that there were a lot, and that they owed quite a bit to his master. In the examples we have, one owes 875 gallons of olive oil, and the other owes a thousand bushels of wheat. The manager then reaches into the strong box, and takes out the bill that the debtor himself would have drawn up and signed, and hands into him and says, look here's the only record of your debt. Draw up a new bill for half as much, and then to another take off 20%. You can imagine how overjoyed these men would be.

Now the tenants think the steward is acting on behalf of the master, and that the master has suddenly been overcome with feelings of benevolence, so they go along in a heartbeat. No doubt soon the entire town is singing the praises of the boss who was so kind to his debtors.

What can the Master do at this point? He is going to look like a fool and a rotten hearted wretch if he goes back and rescinds this act of generosity done in his name. Also, the only record of the debts has been changed, legally he's going to have a hard time proving who really owed what. So he's in a Catch-22 situation. He's been cheated by the unrighteous manager, but he can't do anything to change the situation. All he can do is chuckle to himself and say "that is one shrewd operator, he certainly got the best of me there." ***He'll also probably make a mental note to make sure he does the first century equivalent of having security escort the former employee to the door the next time he fires some one.***

Now the biggest problem that arises in interpreting the parable is at this point. People ask, why is Jesus commending a dishonest manager for his shrewdness and telling us to do likewise? The answer is that what is being set before us is an example teaching Christians to be just as clever and dishonest, but to be just as shrewd in our honesty.

What did the manager do? He shrewdly used the materials his master had provided him with to make preparation for his own earthly future, so that when he was forced to leave one house, another would be ready for him. He planned ahead and used what was made available to him.

Jesus is teaching, that in respect to the way they use their resources, the unsaved are often shrewder and more astute than professing Christians. What is the objective of the non-Christian? Most often it really isn't more complex than that of unrighteous steward – peace, ease, and prosperity. So, honestly or dishonestly they use their means to achieve that ends.

What about the objective of believers? What is supposed to be your chief end? Well we confess that it is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, that means serving him in this life and preparing for heaven doesn't it? And yet do you use your means to achieve that ends? The bizarre thing is often that while our stated objective is radically different from that of non-Christians, we often use our means as though our objective was exactly the same as theirs. ***Shouldn't there be a big difference in the way you are preparing for your future and the way that your unbelieving neighbors are preparing for theirs?***

What good is money for instance? Well ultimately, unless you inherently value little green pieces of paper with portraits of dead presidents on them, its only real value lies in what you use it for. Now you can't buy salvation, only Jesus could purchase your redemption and he did that with not with money but with his precious blood on the cross. That's why Paul says in Acts 20:28 calls it the "***Church of God, that Jesus purchased with His own blood.***" But what can you do? You can serve God with it! In so doing you take that which is given to you by God to be a steward of and you invest it like the profitable servants in the parable of the talents. That is a wise use of your money and in so doing you lay up treasure for yourself in heaven.

You take that which is not lasting, not really yours, and which you cannot take with you, and you turn it into something that lasts forever, and which can never be taken away from you. [Take a look at the quote by Thomas Adams in your folder.]

How do we do that? Well there are many applications of that principle, the primary one though is in deeds of charity. In providing for those in need, the Christian serves the Lord who sets the example for us in the way that he gave everything so that poor, blind, beggars like you and me might inherit an eternal kingdom.

Let me give you another Adam's quote along those lines – "***Let us make the poor our friends by our alms, not our enemies by our scorns. We had better have the ears of God full of their prayers, than heaps of money in our own coffers with their curses.***"

The way you use the material goods that God has given you to be a steward is one of the many indications of how faithful to him you are. Jesus asks, if you aren't faithful with earthly riches, how is it that you believe you are worthy of heavenly riches? The worldling who squandered every good gift God gave him on himself, who lives like the prodigal did wasting his money on earthly pleasures in the far away from his heavenly father may think he will have riches in heaven, but he hasn't stopped to consider, if he wasn't even faithful with the *dust his master gave him* why would he be rewarded with *gold*?

That is the point of verses 11 and 12 – if you aren't faithful in the use of things in this world who is going to trust you with the real riches?

Bob Dylan got it right when he sang, "you're gonna have to serve somebody" Jesus says it is impossible to serve two masters. Now I know that some of you are struggling with this dilemma, trying to serve more than one master and I can truly say that my heart aches to see the pain that that struggle causes. Its nothing new, many coming running like the rich young ruler to ask Christ how to be saved, but then end up sorrowing when they hear that they cannot serve him and the world at the same time. Still many keep trying in vain, as JC Ryle put it:

Thousands on every side are continually trying to do the thing which Christ pronounces impossible. They are endeavoring to be friends of the world and friends of God at the same time. Their consciences are so far enlightened, that they feel they must have some religion. But their affections are so chained down to earthly things, that they never come up to the mark of being true Christians. And hence they live in a state of constant discomfort. They have too much religion to be happy in the world, and they have too much of the world in their hearts to be happy in their religion. In short, they waste their time in laboring to do that which cannot be done. They are striving to "serve God and mammon."

Friends leave off trying to serve God and the World, it will cause you nothing but pain and frustration.

Applications:

1) Children – Now while you still have precious few goods, decide now that you will live your lives for how ever long they may be serving God with whatever he gives you.

- 1) Sharing
- 2) Marriage
- 3) Seeking The Kingdom

2) Parents – Remember the Example you set before your children, is seeking the kingdom central, or are you sending a two masters message?

4) Lastly remember, this is not a message that Christianity consists of good works, they'll be part of any true Christian walk as Luther put it: "true faith will no more fail to produce them than the sun can cease to give light." But ultimately Jesus is speaking here of preparing for the future, you cannot purchase heaven even if you were to ensure that every item of furniture in this room had a "donated by plaque" with your name on it. Because as I said before the cost of your salvation, can only be purchased by Christ, and applied by faith alone in Him, the key to salvation then lies in trusting in Christ alone for salvation, that is how you best prepare for the future. Salvation lies in *done, not it do!* In acting as the prodigal did.