

FAITHFUL IN WORLDLY THINGS

Parable 20: The Unjust Steward

Lk 16:1-13

I. ILLUSTRATION—A SHREWD MANAGER

Henry Ford visited Ireland to trace his ancestry

Fund-raiser from retirement home solicited \$1000 support—which Ford gave

Newspaper article said Ford gave \$50,000—which gave Ford great publicity

Shrewd fund-raiser asked for remaining other \$49,000

Or he would tell the paper—which would publish a retraction—Ford gave *only* \$1000!

Ford gave the money—on one condition—a sign would be posted over the door of the home

I was a stranger, and you took me in—Mt 25:35

II. BACKGROUND

1. THE BIBLE SPEAKS FREQUENTLY ABOUT WORLDLY THINGS
 - o Over **1200** references to money, riches, wealth, possessions
 - o Only **3 books** do not refer to them—**Galatians, II and III John**
2. ONE-THIRD OF JESUS' PARABLES REFER TO MONEY
 - o Two Debtors—**Lk 7**
 - o Pearl of Great Price—**Lk 13**
 - o Treasure in the Field—**Lk 13**
 - o Counting the Cost—**Lk 14**
 - o Day Laborers in Vineyard—**Mt 20**
 - o Talents—**Mt 25**
 - o 10 Minas—**Lk 19**
 - o Lost Coin—**Lk 15**
 - o Prodigal Son—**Lk 15**
 - o Three parables about 'Rich Men'
 - Rich Fool—**Lk 12**
 - Rich Man and Lazarus—**Lk 16**
 - Unjust Steward—begins with—*There was a rich man*—**Lk 16**

III. BIBLICAL TEXT—LUKE 16:1-13

Lk 16:1-13—*1 Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions. 2 And he called*

him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ 3 The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.’ 5 And he summoned each one of his master’s debtors, and he began saying to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ 6 And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ And 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?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ 8 And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are shrewder in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. 9 And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings. 10 “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. 11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? 12 And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s, who will give you that which 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 devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

IV. EXPLANATION

A. CONTEXT

1. BACKGROUND—JESUS SPOKE TO PHARISEES—IN [CHAPTER 15](#)
2. HERE—JESUS SPEAKS TO HIS DISCIPLES—TWO PARABLES
 - o Put wealth and possessions into proper perspective
 - o This one—followed by ‘The Rich Man and Lazarus’
3. BUT THE PHARISEES—LOVERS OF MONEY—WERE LISTENING AND SCOFFING
 - o In front of His disciples—Jesus rebuked the Pharisees
 - o For their greed and legalism

Lk 16:15—*You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.*

B. PURPOSE AND NATURE

1. PURPOSE—TO TEACH DISCIPLES THE PROPER USE OF MONEY AND WEALTH
2. NATURE—SHOCKING AND CONTROVERSIAL
 - o Many of Jesus’ parables turned the world upside down
 - o Here—the ‘hero’ is the most unlikely of persons—a dishonest schemer
 - o Difficulty—does this parable condone his dishonesty and scheming?

C. THE PARABLE

1. THE RICH MAN

- Probably uneducated but successful in business
- Maybe a money-lender—who took payment in kind
- If so—he incorporated interest into his bills—to avoid illegality of usury
- All ‘rich men’ in Gospels are of dubious character—except Joseph of Arimathea

2. THE STEWARD

a. Who he was

1. **οικονομος** = household steward—‘law of the house’
2. Older person of some wealth/status
 - Not strong enough to dig
 - Too proud to beg
3. *Not* a slave—who would have been demoted and punished
 - Instead—his punishment = dismissal from employment

b. What he did—‘squandered’

1. **διασκορπιζω** = to scatter—throw to the wind
2. This action—is not dishonest—but imprudent and wasteful
3. Like the Prodigal Son—same verb

Lk 15:13—*he squandered his estate in riotous living*

c. Consequences—faced unemployment and starvation

3. THE RICH MAN’S DISCIPLINE

- Merciful—did not fire him immediately
- Unlike modern companies—clean out your desk *today*—change locks to your office
- He had a brief opportunity to fix things

4. THE STEWARD’S RESPONSE

a. Based on two principles

- Principle of **Agency**
- Principle of **Reciprocity**

b. Principle of Agency

- The agent reflects the character of his employer
- The agent acts with full authority of his employer
- Whatever the steward does—reflects directly on the master—who is responsible

c. Acted to ingratiate himself to debtors

1. Motive—to find other jobs—livelihood

- *people will welcome me into their homes*—οἶκος
- Not just for their hospitality
- But—to be their steward—οἰκονομος

2. Principle of reciprocity

- Generosity and benevolence were to be repaid—by peers

Lk 14:12-14—*When you give a lunch or dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.*

d. Adjusting the books

1. **100 ‘baths’** of oil = 800-900 gallons of olive oil
 - The yield of 150 olive trees = 3 years wages
2. **100 ‘kor’** of wheat = 1100 bushels
 - Enough to feed 150 persons for one year
 - The yield of 100 acres = 7 ½ years wages
3. The discount
 - 50% of oil—20% of wheat
 - Total discount = 500 dinarii = about 2 years wages

5. THE RESULTS

a. Rich Man’s **position**

- In the eyes of his debtors—he was benevolent—merciful to them
- He could not punish the steward—without looking harsh—losing face

b. Rich Man’s **action**

1. Praised the steward—instead of punishing him
 - Implication—the steward kept his job
2. Reason for praise
 - a. Steward acted ‘shrewdly’
 - b. φρονιμος = prudently—wisely
 - c. Acting with practical wisdom—foresight to protect one’s interest
 - d. From root word—‘wise’—that describes
 - ☆ The wise man—who built on the rock—Mt 7
 - ☆ The wise virgins—who had their lamps ready—Mt 25
- e. Additional implied compliment

☆ He acted swiftly—before the master expelled him

6. THE IMPLICATIONS

- a. **Two possible interpretations** of steward's actions
 - He acted **honestly**—and effectively
 - He acted **unjustly**—*but* still effectively
- b. **Honest** and effective
 1. He cancelled the imbedded interest—which was illegal anyway
 - Which made his master—a moneylender—look benevolent
 2. Or he cut his own commission
 - Which ingratiated himself to the debtors
- c. **Unjust**—but still effective
 - He simply 'cut a deal' to 'cut his losses' at the expense of his master
 - Jesus *did* describe him as an 'unrighteous manager'—**v8**
- d. Either way—results were beneficial
 - His master looked benevolent—and he ingratiated himself to the debtors
- e. The Rich Man's praise
 - Was *not* for dishonest trickery
 - *But* for wisdom and swift action—which he genuinely admired

D. JESUS' MAIN PRINCIPLE

8b—*for the sons of this age are shrewder in relation to their own kind than the sons of light*

1. WISER IN RELATION TO THEIR OWN KIND

- a. Meaning = clear-eyed—hard-nosed—practical wisdom—that knows all the angles
- b. One who understands how the 'world'—business world—functions
- c. **Jesus Himself**—was wise among His own kind
 - Joseph was probably dead
 - Jesus was a tradesman—a carpenter—and main breadwinner
 - He labored—bartered—sweat—to provide for family
 - And taught his brothers the tools of His trade—and the business of His craft

2. SONS OF LIGHT

- a. Christians can be un-shrewd—naïve—gullible
- b. Christians need to
 - Be realistic—astute—tough-minded—wise in everything—especially money
 - Have foresight—show ingenuity—take appropriate risks—and seize the day

- c. Jesus warned his disciples

Mt 10:16—*I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.*

- d. Seize the opportunity—in a timely manner

Eph 5:15-16—*Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise. Take advantage of every opportunity because these are evil days.*

3. “HOW MUCH MORE” [IMPLIED]

- a. This is a ‘crisis’ parable—an analogy telling us what to do in danger

1. The analogy leads us to ask—“How much more?”

2. Like the **Reluctant Neighbor**—**Lk 11**

➤ ‘How much more’—will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit

3. Like the **Unjust Judge**—**Lk 18**

➤ ‘How much more’—will God bring justice

- b. If the children of this age act wisely in the world

▪ ‘How much more’—should Christians act wisely and seize the day

- c. Application

▪ Are we as committed to the Lord as we are to our worldly interests?!

▪ If we spend so much time/passion on them—how much more do we owe God?!

E. THREE APPLICATIONS—vv9-13

1. **MAKE FRIENDS** BY USING WORLDLY WEALTH

make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings

- a. **wealth of unrighteousness** = unjust mammon = worldly money that corrupts

1. It is **temporary**

➤ ‘**when it fails**’—it always comes to an end—with death

➤ Unlike lasting relationships—that really matter—in ‘**eternal dwellings**’

2. Contrasted with ‘**true riches**’—**v11** = eternal treasure in heaven

- b. Spend your money where it really counts

▪ **Make friends** by using worldly money, which is so easily put to wrong use

▪ Use it to help others—those in need—and draw them to God

- c. This will build treasure in heaven

▪ Showing such things as brotherly kindness and love to others results in this:

II Pe 1:11—*you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*

d. **Illustrations**

1. **Thank You for Giving to the Lord**

One by one they came, as far as the eye could see
Each one somehow touched by your generosity
Little things that you had done, sacrifices made
Unnoticed on the earth, heaven now proclaims . . .
As Jesus took your hand, and you stood before the Lord
And He said my child look around you, for great is your reward
Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am a life that was changed
Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am so glad you gave

2. **John D. Rockefeller**

- **Wealthiest American at turn of 20th century—worth 1.5% US economy**
- **Gave \$550 million to philanthropic causes**
- **Last 40 years of 19th century—he gave to**
 - ☆ **357 churches and missionary organizations**
 - ☆ **124 missionaries and ministers**
 - ☆ **165 social welfare and moral reform organizations**
 - ☆ **103 schools and universities**
 - ☆ **39 medical and healthcare institutions**
- **Started University of Chicago and Rockefeller Foundation**
- **Medical research: malaria, scarlet fever, typhus, meningitis—hookworm**
- **Secured future of Black universities: Tuskegee, Spellman, Morehouse**

2. FAITHFUL USE OF WORLDLY POSSESSIONS **COUNTS ETERNALLY**

a. General principle

- Stewardship of worldly possessions has eternal consequences
 - I Cor 4:2—*it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy***
- This stewardship is a measure of character

b. Faithful with—**little things**—**v10**

- **Verse 10**—parallels the **Parable of 10 minas**
 - Lk 19:17—*Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.***

- Here on **earth** we are stewards of **little things**—compared to heavenly treasures
- If we are good stewards now—we can be trusted with ‘true riches’ to come
- How we use things *now*—determines level of responsibility given us in heaven

c. Faithful with—**worldly wealth**—**v11**

- How we manage mammon—determines if we can be trusted with ‘true riches’
 - We are accountable—how we spend money today—is it for eternal purposes?
 - Same is true of church—do we hoard resources—or use them for the kingdom?
- d. Faithful with—**others’ possessions**—v12
- What we have now—does not belong to us—*but* is on loan from God
 - If we are unfaithful with these things—how can we manage our own inheritance?
 - This was the problem of the **Prodigal Son**—he **squandered** his father’s estate
- e. Observations
- Here and now—is God’s training school for eternal stewardship
 - Life is a daily test—to show if we can be trusted with what God gives us
 - It is not the amount of money that counts—but our wisdom and way we use it
3. HOW SHOULD WE **RELATE TO GOD AND WEALTH?**
- a. Clear-cut choice
- We can have only one master
 - We can either—serve God—or serve wealth
- b. Explanation
1. Relationship to money
 - We can either be—a **steward of** mammon
 - Or a **slave to** mammon
 - But we can **never be masters** of mammon
 - Only God is powerful enough to control worldly wealth and all its effects
 2. No neutral ground
 - Either God owns our wealth—or it owns us
 - When we try to master wealth—it masters us—and becomes our **enemy!**
 3. When we make the Lord our Master
 - He does not take our money
 - He transforms it to be our ally—not our enemy
 4. Proper stewardship of money—under God—prevents bondage to money
- c. Principle
- Fools serve money—and leave it behind
 - Wise believers serve God—and invest in eternity

VI. INVITATION

MY FAITH HAS FOUND A RESTING PLACE

**My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device or creed;
I trust the ever-living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.**

**Refrain:
I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.**

**Enough for me that Jesus saves,
This ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I came to Him,
He'll never cast me out.**

**My heart is leaning on the Word,
The living Word of God,
Salvation by my Savior's name,
Salvation through His blood.**

**My great physician heals the sick,
The lost He came to save;
For me His precious blood He shed,
For me His life He gave.**