

**“Stewardship”
(Luke 16:1-15)
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Introduction:

Luke 16:1-15 NIV ¹ Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' ³ "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg-- ⁴ I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' ⁵ "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ "Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. "The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' ⁷ "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' "A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. "He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' ⁸ "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. ¹⁰ "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? ¹³ "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

In this parable there was a rich man, a master of a business. And as most business owners they allow managers to run the business. If you're a Korean business owner, this may have been the story that sealed the deal for you *not* to entrust your business to a manager. Because the manager may turn out to be a crook.

First, when you think about the role of a manager, we know that his or her job is to do their best to manage the business of the boss, the shareholders, or the owners. That's their job. And so what's given to managers is responsibility, authority, and trust. Friends you and I are managers too. God has called us to be stewards with everything we have. It can be said that each of us, we own nothing; because everything is on loan from God. Our jobs, our education, our relationships, our natural talents, our children, our money, and our opportunities...they're all resources that are on loan. And with these things, God has given us responsibility, authority and trust. And I think there's really only one guideline. Every resource you have, manage it as if it belonged to God. That's what is expected from all of us.

Anyway it happens that this manager is called into the office. Some of you know that dreaded call into the office. "I'd like to have a word with you. Be in my office in two minutes." And some serious charges are brought against the manager. At first it looks like he's just been an incompetent manager. He's been wasting his master's possessions. But later in the story it says that the manager was dishonest. So there was some shady stuff going on, the nature of which we do not know. Call it what you want. He was stealing from the till, he was shaving a bit extra for himself, whatever. He wasn't being responsible and he abused his authority and trust.

And because he knows he going to be fired, he starts to practice what some call crafty, others call shady, business practices.

The first debtor owed the boss 100 measures of oil, which was a significant debt. This would have been equal to 875 gallons or 3200 liters and would have been priced at 1000 denarii which is 1000 day's wages. And the manager gives a 50% reduction.

The next guy owed 100 measures of wheat or the yield of about 100 acres of grain, priced at 2500-3000 denarii. And he gives him a 20% reduction.

Now the question remains, how was the manager able to possess the liberty to reduce these debts like that? Scholars have given three explanations for how/why the manager altered the debts. And all the explanations come with their own problems.

1. The manger lowered the price w/o the master's approval. He may have been thinking, well I'm fired. I've got nothing to gain with my master so I'll make my master 'eat it'. This may also have shown the debtors that his master was cheating his customers.
2. The manager removed the interest charge from the debt in accordance w/ Mosaic Law. Jews weren't permitted to charge interest. But then the question remains as to why a different percentage cut was different for the two debts. It may be because there were differing prices or rates for different materials.
3. And the final reason stated by scholars is that the manager removed his own commission. So he himself took a hit.

Now it could be any one of these three or a combination of them. We're just not sure. But in any case it was so that the manager could gain personal brownie points, some favors, from the debtors. Once he's fired, he'll need a place to work. He says he's too old to dig, the most menial of jobs, and too proud to beg.

Now verse 8 is where we come up with some problems. Look at what it says...

⁸ "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.

Scholars share that this is the most difficult of all the parables to interpret and understand. Because it seems that the Lord is commending dishonesty.

What do we do whenever we come across an *apparent* contraction in the scriptures? Well, by faith and humility, we say, I know God does not lie. I know he does not contradict himself. I know the message of scripture is unified and does not contradict itself. Therefore, I must step away from the text, and prayerfully, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and with the best of my mental faculties, determine the true meaning of the text, that will be in agreement with what is taught in the rest of the Bible.

So we know that Jesus could not be commending dishonesty. That cannot be the point and we know that from the rest of the story and following teaching. So what's going on in this parable?

Jesus is not commending the dishonest manager for beating the system, for his behind the master's back maneuvering. So what is he saying. Well what he's not saying is...We can learn

from the dishonest manager. Just like the dishonest manager conducted his affairs, we too should use any means, even dishonest ones, in order to justify the end. The goal is what's important. I don't care how you get there. That is **not** what Jesus is saying.

In this parable what Jesus is doing is arguing from the lesser to the greater. He's essentially saying that if people of this world act for their own self-interest and for their own self-preservation, in a dishonest, yet cunning and shrewd manner, how much more so should the people of God use the resources of time, talents, influence, and resources, in an honest way, be creative and shrewd to impact the world for God?

One scholar on Luke said it like this. "So if the sons of this age give more foresight to their future, they are more shrewd in their dealings w/ people than are God's children. God's children should be shrewd with possessions by being generous. Such acts show charity and foresight (Bock, 1332)."

So be wise. Don't forget who you are and why you are here. Don't let the non-christian out do you. And for goodness sake don't live like they do.

Application (9-13)

Now that we understand what this story means, let's move to the application. Look with me once again to verses 9-13.

⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. ¹⁰ "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? ¹³ "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Use worldly wealth for the right reasons.

⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

Literally "worldly wealth" is "mammon of unrighteousness" Why is it that? Because the pursuit of it leads to all kinds of evils as Paul wrote in 1 Timothy.

How do you gain friends with worldly wealth? Is this saying, buy friends...is this a politicians favorite verse? Again how does a person gain friends through worldly wealth? One word.
Generosity.

This verse is talking about money and salvation for it says...the way you are generous with money will determine whether or not you get to heaven. Now let me make this clear. Salvation is by grace through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no other way. But that salvation that we have must be characterized by a loyalty change and a lifestyle change. Whatever our loyalty was previous, it is now to Christ. And whatever our lifestyle was previous, it is different now.

Money and salvation is a specific example of the larger issue of obedience and salvation. And the topic of money comes up all the time because it just happens to be one of those things we're all familiar with and with which we all struggle. Over and over again in the bible, it makes a connection between genuine spirituality and our attitudes and behavior with money. Try as you like, you cannot dance around the connection. Try to separate the two, and you will find you cannot.

And at the end of the day, God commands us to use money for the right reasons...to be a person of eternal influence. Here's a very general example. The haves must help the have-nots. A very specific example. There are thousands. Food banks, missionaries, AA clinics, drug rehab centers, city missions, soup kitchens, buying Tim Hortons gift certificates to give to the homeless person you walk past every day.

Be a faithful steward of worldly wealth

¹⁰ "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

The principle in the bible is always the same. It isn't about how much or little we have. It's about what we do with what we have.

And do you know that much of what we call Western capitalism or Western entrepreneurialism has its roots in Christianity. The West was founded on Christian values and believe it or not the West is what it is because of the influence of the Christian work-ethic, the Christian's attitude toward stewardship, the Christian's redemptive attitude toward work and labor and the arts and creativity and so on.

And I think what Christ is commending in this dishonest steward is shrewdness. What a sly dude. What a creative guy. Yeah, definitely not for the most godly of reasons, but shrewd nonetheless. And I want to exhort each person here. As pastoral team both in EM and KM embrace creativity, embrace the entrepreneurial spirit, a frontier mentality, a we can do it because God is in it, type of mentality. We're not afraid to try something new and fail. We're not afraid to do something differently, so long as it doesn't conflict w/ Scripture. And I want to exhort each person here. God has gifted each person here with an incredible amount of resources...resources that take the shape of dollars and cents, life experiences, job and career skills, education, creativity, relationship/connections/networks...and I think you and I are sitting on a Kingdom of God gold mine. What if you were to take what you've got, not what you don't have...and give it up as an offering to God. And the prayer can go like this. "God, you've given me the following resources. And God you want me to be a faithful steward of these things. You've blessed be with a mind that's designed to be innovative and creative. Lord, I give that to you as an offering. Show me how I can use this resource for the Kingdom. I want to obey. Amen."

And we must be a faithful steward of worldly wealth because Faithfulness of worldly wealth is an indicator of a deeper faithfulness.

¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

Do you know what God is saying here? If I can't trust you with money, do you think I'd trust you with a church? Do you think I'd trust you with souls? Do you think I'd trust you with a kingdom project? Do you think I'd let you lead something with eternal value? You've got to be kidding? A Christian's faithfulness with money determines his faithfulness in more important matters. Why do you think it says in 1 Timothy that elders and deacons can't be lovers of money, must not pursue dishonest gain? A spiritual steward must first be a financial steward.

There really is only one purpose for worldly wealth.

¹³ "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Some people try to have it both ways. They want to be selfish with their worldly wealth and serve God. They want to be greedy and godly. Impossible. You can't love two wives or two husbands. You can't be pregnant and not pregnant at the same time. You can't mix oil and water. Whatever argument you want to use, the biblical principle is clear as crystal. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Conclusion:

You can't try to be a seriously follower of Christ before long, until it affects your attitude and behavior with money. Money is an incredible resource. It's a necessary commodity. It isn't everything, but you can't do much without it. And God's calling us to Kingdom faithfulness.