

## **The Shrewd Manager**

Luke 16:1-13 (04-05-2020)

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I want to thank everyone for your love, prayers, cards, gifts, and many texts checking in on me over the past couple of months. I'm thankful for doctors, nurses and especially my wife being by my side. And now we have this sneaky virus to deal with. This pandemic is teaching all of us is how vulnerable we are and how easily God can bring the world to a halt. Sadly, much of the media fails to recognize the hand of God in all this. In fact, they mock and ridicule anyone like Mike Lindell (Mr. Pillow), who stands up and talks about praying and looking to God for help. Some are even blaming Christians for the virus! I'm reminded of how people will react to the bowl judgments in Revelation 16:8 when God sends intense heat into the world: "they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory." So we pray for people to turn to the Lord in the midst of our current plague.

Turn to Luke 16 this morning for a most fascinating story given by Jesus to His disciples about a wealthy financier, we'll call him Max, and his business manager we'll call Lou, who squandered Max's wealth. Jesus uses the unscrupulous manager to teach us a lesson about planning for the future. Let's get the scene before us.

*Luke 16:1-2 Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man (Max) who had a manager (Lou), 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.'*

Last week Bryce taught us about the squandering but humbled son. Now Christ is going to use this squandering steward or manager to teach us a lesson on how to invest the resources God has given us. So what happened? Max perhaps lives up in Damascus and has this very lucrative business of lending commodities like grain to farmers and oil to merchants running small oil lamp businesses. Max isn't unlike a business owner who lives in New York City in an exclusive penthouse off Times Square and owns a business or two here in Evansville. He's been very successful.

Word gets back to Max that his trusted steward – stewards or managers must be trustworthy to collect payments and get them back to the owner – so word gets back to Max that Lou was squandering the profits, perhaps embezzling, somehow cooking the books. He was getting richer; you could see it in the clothes he wore, the house he was living in, today, the exclusive restaurants, living way above the standard of a manager. He may have brought others into his corrupt scheme, and one of them ratted. So Max calls him in to give account, show him the books, and he fires Lou. Lou's chickens came home to roost. What's he going to do? Here's where it gets really interesting and we're surprised that Jesus uses this cheating manager as an example.

Some of you remember Bernie Madoff back in 2008, a very congenial financier in New York City who ran the biggest Ponzi scheme in history. He bilked his investors of 50 billion dollars. One day he called his sons into his office and confessed, "It's all been one big lie." He had gained people's trust with his warm, assuring personality so they trusted him. He's still sitting in jail. Now we'd be surprised if Jesus used Bernie's positive qualities to use as an example. We're surprised at the direction our story takes and that Jesus uses this squandering cheat as an example. So what does Lou do? He's in a tight place.

*Luke 16:3 "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.*

This squandering steward is used to the high life. His hands are soft and smooth. He couldn't dig. His

hands would blister up within an hour. And he certainly isn't going to beg. So he comes up with a scheme that brings praise from Max and a teachable lesson from Jesus. Lou is one sharp cookie.

*Luke 16:4-7 '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.'*

He pays that oil merchant a visit and asks how much he owes (he should have known as a steward). One hundred measures of oil. "Quickly write down fifty." The oil merchant is super pleased with that kind of savings. Then he asks the farmer. He owes one hundred measures of grain. "Write down 80 measures on your bill."

Now notice Max's response to this unrighteous manager. He praises him.

*Luke 16:8 "And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light."*

Max saw in Lou a shrewd operator, much like himself, shrewdly seizing his opportunities to provide security for himself. The reduction in costs may have been Lou's commission. Lou was planning for his future. He gave these debtors such a good deal; he knew they would open their homes and welcome him in after he was kicked out of Max's business. He knew how to operate. He was street smart. He knew how he could ingratiate himself with these debtors. He acted shrewdly.

This is where the positive side of the story comes in. Jesus says, "Learn from Lou. Lou did whatever it took to take care of his future, and he did it quickly. Calvin puts it perfectly, "Ungodly and worldly men are more industrious and skillful in conducting the affairs of this fading life than the children of God are anxious to obtain the heavenly and eternal life." We should provide for the future "with at least as much earnestness as ungodly men display by attending to their own interests in the world."

So Lou quickly and wisely planned ahead. He used his position to provide for his future. Jesus is saying this. Use the resources and the wealth that God has given you to make friends with people in this world. God has given you all you have, and He has given it to you, not to hoard, not to worship, not to be a lover of money that deceives and ruins. He has given you your resources to be a blessing to others so that, when you die, when the unrighteous wealth fails, you will be joyfully welcomed into heaven.

*Luke 16:9 "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."*

Are you kidding me? If I use my resources, my money, my possessions, to bless others, I will be blessed by others when I get to heaven? Exactly. Notice, Jesus calls it "wealth of unrighteousness." Money is a very dangerous thing. God gives it to you, but how quickly we begin to think our wealth, our possessions are ours! 1 Timothy 6:10 describes the power wealth can have over our souls. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It deceives us into feeling self-sufficient. It puffs up our ego. It makes us selfish. Nothing reveals our hearts like how we think of our possessions. You and I must constantly remember we are stewards of God's property. God has entrusted it to you. It's not your money; it's God's. That's why Paul said, "It's required in stewards that a man be found trustworthy." So that, when needs arise, when opportunities come for you to invest in eternal things, in the souls of people, in meeting physical needs of others, you will quickly and willingly give to meet the needs of others. When you hear of a

missionary who has needs, you quickly respond by giving some of the wealth God has entrusted to you. Many of you in our church are quick to do this very thing.

When you search the Scriptures, it's amazing how God makes a big deal about His people using their resources to bless others. Listen to these simple assurances:

- Psalm 41:1 *How blessed is he who considers the helpless; The LORD will deliver him in a day of trouble.*
- Proverbs 19:17 *One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.*
- 1Timothy 6:17-18 *As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,*
- Hebrews 13:16 *And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*
- Proverbs 31:20 *She extends her hand to the poor, And she stretches out her hands to the needy.*

You might think, "But I don't know any poor people." You may get to know some. As our economy spirals down, we may have more opportunity to give and meet urgent needs.

But let's be clear here. Your stewarding God's resources in godly ways will not earn you that eternal dwelling. Only Jesus can get you there. And our heart weeps for so many people that think they are buying a place in heaven with all their philanthropy. They are often proud of their charity. They often toot their horns so everyone knows how much they've donated to this cause or that. No, they are deceived in their pride and self-righteousness. Christ and Christ alone will get anyone into heaven. But the fact remains, God promises He will reward us in heaven if we have given cheerfully and helped to meet the needs of others. When you die, there will be people there to welcome you and thank you for your liberal, cheerful giving. Maybe some Lithuanians, or Brits, or Indians, or Italians, or Arabs, or college students – many college students. You gave so Campus Outreach staff could reach college students and see them come to Christ.

Randy Alcorn wrote a book, *The Treasure Principle*. The principle is simple: You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead. That's what Jesus meant when He told us to lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven.

Back to our shrewd unrighteous manager who quickly made friends for his future. Jesus takes the opportunity to disciple us further in how we handle the resources God sows into our lives in this world. Be faithful in the little things God entrusts to you, whether it is money or opportunities to serve. The opportunities God gives you expose your heart of either faithfulness or selfishness.

*Luke 16:10-12 "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?"*

If you squander the little things, if you misuse the money and opportunities God has entrusted to you, don't expect God's greater blessings on your life. Again, how we think about and how we use the resources of life God gives us exposes where our heart really is. Some guys graduate from seminary to pastor, but they don't want a church of thirty or forty people. They want a mega-church right out of the chute. Be faithful with that class of junior age youngsters. God will entrust you with greater things. Be faithful as an opener and closer. God will entrust greater things to you. Which takes us to the next truth?

How you think about and use the resources God has given you exposes who your God really is.

*Luke 16:13 "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."*

Jesus talks so much about money and wealth because He knows how tempting and deceiving money can be. He knows how easy it is to allow money to become your treasure. And both money and God are exclusive masters. Learn from Christ right here. It is impossible to serve both. Many try but it is impossible. Matthew 6:21 says "Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is." Are you thinking about God more, or your shrinking nest egg you were so proud of? What makes you angrier, when someone dings your car or blasphemes your Savior's name? What holds greater value in your life, your possessions or your Savior? Are you jealous when others do better financially than you? Do you live with a heart of hidden greed, hoping your ship will come in some day? Remember Demas? He forsook Paul, loving this present life. His treasure was not in heaven.

I love how Paul ended his message to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.

*Act 20:33-35 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. 34 "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

In Calvin's day, the cardinals and archbishops and the pope in Rome lived in opulent palaces, like kings. Calvin lived in a simple house on Canon Street in Geneva. Calvin said, "I am truly rich because I am abundantly satisfied with the little I have." When Calvin died, Pope Pius IV said, "The strength of that heretic came from the fact that money was nothing to him." (*This was John Calvin*, Halsema, pp. 164-165). Calvin's treasure was in heaven. And there were untold thousands there to greet him when he finally died and went to be with his Lord.

Learn from the shrewd but unrighteous steward. Plan for your future. Be a cheerful giver. Meet the needs of others, beginning with your own family. Don't let the love of money deceive and destroy your heart. Be faithful in the little things God has given you. Be quick to meet urgent needs. You will reap a good return in the heavenly places. Not earned, but rewarded. Missionary Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."