

The stories Jesus told.



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Luke 16.1-15 | August 6, 2017

Prepared by Curtis A. Bronzan
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue engaging the parables in our summer series The Stories Jesus Told. In this study we explore one of the most perplexing of Jesus' parables, commonly called The Shrewd Manager.

It has been called "disturbing" and "the most puzzling." One writer states that "Preachers, writers, interpreters and teachers of the Bible often avoid it like the plague." Another concludes that it "takes the prize for being most ignored – or if not just ignored, dismissed outright."

What have we gotten ourselves into!? Let's dig in!

II. Connecting with One Another

Have you ever been cheated in some way? How did it make you feel? What did you learn from the experience?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Luke 16.1.

This parable features two main characters: A rich man and another man. What does your translation call the other man? If you're meeting in a group, talk about the different titles found in the different translations.

What does each make you think of? What does it imply about their work?

b. Arabic, Syriac, and Coptic translations (which are much closer to Jesus' first century culture) have consistently translated the role of this other man as an "estate manager" and not a banker. This manager would have full authority to carry out estate business, making sales and loans, as well as collecting, forgiving, and paying off the debts of his master. He would have kept careful records (in duplicate) while working with members of the community who had purchased goods on loan or rented land to grow crops.

Read Luke 16.2.

What is happening here? How do you think the "rich man" came to know the manager was wasting his possessions? (Think through this before continuing on)

Kenneth Bailey concludes, "the natural assumption is that the master's friends in the community told him not to trust his steward. If the reports were from other servants,

the master would investigate further. Clearly, the reports are from sources that the master instinctively considers reliable.”

What do you make of this explanation?

- c. Look again at verse 2. What is the master’s technique: Is he seeking more information – or accusing his manager?

If it’s the former, what information is he seeking?

If the latter, what is he accusing him of?

- d. “Give an account of your management” does not mean to defend oneself or even balance the books. It means “turn in your books.” In short, the manager is fired on the spot. This means he would not only be without a job, but also without a home, as he would have lived in the estate.

Do you think that is fair? Why or why not?

- e. Reread Luke 16.1-2, then continue through verse 4.

The manager could have responded in four ways. First, he could have appealed to their working relationship, which may have spanned generations. Second, he could have claimed it wasn’t his fault. Third, he could have demanded to speak to his accusers. Lastly, he could have sent his own influential friends to plead his case.

Instead, he remains silent. Why?

- f. In his interior monologue, the manager considers a few options, settling on the third. How would you characterize the first two? Why doesn’t he choose those?

The third option, to be “welcomed into another’s house,” means to get another job (including another place to live!).

Before we continue, answer three quick questions: Though the manager has been asked to turn in his books, has he done so yet? Does anyone other than “the rich man” know he’s been fired? What do you think he’s going to do!?

- g. Read Luke 16.5-7.

Essentially, the manager’s sin begets more sin. He “sins that grace may increase.” After being caught stealing, you’d think he would repent, but no! (I told you this was a wild parable!)

How do you think his boss will respond? Why?

- h. Though the percentages are different, the reduced amounts are similar – and massive! Each debtor receives a 500 denarii discount, roughly equivalent to a laborer’s salary for a year and a half.

Why do you think the manager has the debtors write in the new amount? How does that “implicate them” in his plan?

It is important to remember that the manager acts with the full authority of his master. What, then, do these debtors think is taking place? How would they react?

- i. One author concludes, "Each debtor makes the suggested changes in his rental agreement and returns to the village to share the 'public' good news with family and friends. As word spreads in the village a festive mood breaks out in celebration of the most generous man who ever rented land in the history of the village and in praise of his steward who convinced the master to make huge reductions in their rents."

If that's the case, let's return to a question asked above, "How do you think the rich man will respond?"

- j. The rich man has two options: He could go to the village, explain the ruse, and collect his rent, or, he could enjoy his newfound reputation as a generous man. How would each of these decisions affect "the shrewd manager"?

Read Luke 16.8-15.

Jesus makes an interesting distinction between "children of this age" and "children of light" (see also John 12.36, 1st Thessalonians 5.5, and Ephesians 5.8). Arland Hultgren concludes, "Unfortunately the 'children of light,' that is, persons committed to the light that Jesus and his proclamation bring, do not begin to match [the children of this age] in their wisdom and resourcefulness in relationship to God and to one another... Taken together, the parable and these sayings serve as a summons and challenge to discipleship, which includes the right attitude toward wealth and the use of one's resources..."

What do you make of this explanation? How could we become increasingly wise and resourceful? How are you like or unlike the unjust steward?

- k. One last – but important – insight to this confusing parable: It immediately follows Luke 15, which includes Jesus' three stories to the religious leaders about why he hangs out with "sinners" (The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and the Lost Son).

In both the Prodigal Son and Shrewd Manager stories, the same word is used to describe their respective "squandering." But the Shrewd Manager story is directed to his disciples.

If you're engaging this study prior to hearing the sermon, what do you think is the connection between these two chapters?

If you're engaging this study after hearing the sermon, what did you think of Curtis' connection between these two chapters?

IV. Pray

- a. Pray that we would continue to be and even more so become wise and resourceful as we invite all people to grow into a Christ-centered life in God's family,
- b. Ask God to reveal any blind spots you have with regard to wealth or improper use of resources,
- c. Lift up the middle and high school students who are at camp this week.