

Luke 16:1 - 13 The Shrewd (Unrighteous) Steward

1 Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and this steward 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 account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' 3 "And the steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship 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 stewardship, they will receive 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 steward 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. 9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when it fails, they may 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 "If therefore you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, 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 hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

I have a good friend who lives in Gardnerville Minden south of Carson City out in the rich pasture lands at the foot of the Sierra's. We were both thrust together in the 11th grade into a new school in what is now Valencia but then was just called Saugus in Southern California.

We've been good friends all these years, and he preceeded me to Nevada by about 2 1/2 years and influenced my decision to come here. I longed for a

rural life with beautiful surroundings and dreamed about Bishop in the Eastern Sierras when I was a high school kid.

My friend discovered that Carson City was like Bishop in many of the qualities I loved in the sierras but it was wide open without the restraints of California and land ownership by the Los Angeles Dept. of Water and Power that controlled and restrained opportunity in Bishop. So Carson is where I landed in 1981.

Glen was a carpenter and built 3 homes in Minden. He was just an employee of Raley's market working in produce. But he scraped together a bit of money each time he built a home and sold it and he bought a piece of property there in the pasture lands out in the ranch area that has a view of Job's peak. And he built a beautiful home there.

Time has passed, almost 40 years, and meanwhile, a produce dept. manager who just made steady wages saw McMansions pop up all around his home that he built. Interesting scenario. A guy with just enough wages to get by living frugally in the midst of money.

And what we've both witnessed, me from a distance, is baby boomers who had some luck, were able to gather some money doing whatever over in California, then getting to a retirement age, and coming over the hill to the beautiful pasture in Nevada and building their dream McMansion where life is going to be perfect.

The problem is they build their dream house and get everything set up for the perfect existence they worked for, and then they die. Look at my hair color. The boomers are on their way out. Our generation of boomers is slightly younger than the ones who are dropping dead pretty much wholesale, but it's interesting to watch it play out. We get to go to the yard sales and buy the older boomers junk if it's interesting.

Jesus described what I've just embellished in Luke 12. Another guy who talks to himself like our guy in the parable we just read.

16 *And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 "And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry."' 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 "So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

This life is 5 minutes long. You neglect your family in order to make money. You defer real living until you have several dysfunctional families and a couple of divorces. You drool over your pile of money. You build your McMansion out in the beautiful pasture below Job's Peak. You haul your trophy wife and all your junk to the giant new place, all set up like you dreamed about. And poof, you're gone.

Except, you aren't. You've entered eternity. It is NOT 5 minutes long, it's eternity. What do you have then?

This parable this morning is similar in scope. Except their's a difference. Jesus says, we expect this kind of short sightedness in Satan's world. But you christians are idiots by comparison. You know this life is 5 minutes long. And you still live like all the people in darkness.

Let's look at the parable again, verse by verse.

I Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and this steward was reported to him as squandering his possessions.

He has turned from the previous audience, the scribes and pharisee's who hate him, and Luke tells us that now he's addressing his disciples. The pharisee's are still listening in, but the story, the message is directed to believers, his

disciples.

We know the scribes and pharisees are still there listening because in vs. 14 it says they mocked Him because of this teaching. But Jesus is speaking to His disciples in contrast to this world's mockers who are trapped in blind darkness.

And His story and it's message is rather shocking. Because in a way, he's saying, you idiots are no better than these idiots. (You're all sitting there thinking, now that's a new take on Jesus I hadn't heard before.)

So Jesus sets the stage for a drama; *“There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and this steward was reported to him as squandering his possessions.*

There's a rich man and he has so much wealth he can't take care of everything himself, plus he's rich enough that he probably doesn't really want to be annoyed with the everyday business transactions, so he hires a manager to take care of business while he smokes cigars in his art room.

And the steward; I'm of a generation that is very comfortable with that old english expression, a steward is someone who is given control of and authority over things that belong to someone else. I like it better than manager, but that's just because I'm old.

The steward is squandering this rich man's wealth. He's an untrustworthy steward. He's not investing this other man's wealth wisely in order to produce a good return for the wealth owner. He's wasting, that's what squandering means, he's wasting the rich man's money.

And the rich man finds out. Someone has reported to him that this manager, this steward is being extravagant and wasteful with his wealth. This guy's wasting your money. Your wealth is being wasted with no return for you. Not good.

2 *“And 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.'

In the words of Donald Trump; YOU'RE FIRED! With cause. Now in our world, this guy's access credentials and his keys and card to get him in the door would be shredded and he would be barred immediately from any further negotiations or dealings. Cut off! Escorted off the property. But not so in this time frame. He finds himself in a position where he can still use his previous authority until word gets around that he's been fired and has no authority. Interesting.

3 "And the steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg.

Interesting crisis. I'm fired. No argument about the accusations. I'm used to a life of no labor. What now? Too lazy to dig. Ashamed to be a homeless begger. Don't want to go to either place. Let's see, let's see . . . must be a way to leverage something into the future to avoid those fate's. Actual labor, or begging.

4 'I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the stewardship, they will receive me into their homes.'

He's got a plan so that when people find out he's fired, he can mooch. He's going to get a bunch of people who owe him enough favors that he can sort of go from home to home and mooch an existence without working or begging.

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.'

If you do the weights and measures and try to get a feel in our current culture

and climate, we're talking about 10's of thousands of dollars here. Perhaps hundreds of thousands. We have a name for this. It's called embezzlement. It's a form of theft. It's a way to put someone else's money into your pocket, illegally.

He's leveraging capitol that he doesn't own into future benefits. For him. Pretty despicable character. First he's squandering wealth that doesn't belong to him, and now he's transferring wealth into accounts where he hopes he can collect the benefits in the future.

It's a solid plan because he's got a bunch of these crooked deals, and no one can point a finger without implicating themselves. All of these debtors are sort of working with him in this plot. They gain fantastic wealth by their debts going away. And all they have to do is dole out a bit back to him.

Now here comes the surprise. A lot of people have some trouble with this parable, because we figure, the rich man is always God, but in this parable the Master has a reaction that seems strange. We think it should be more like the master figured out what was going down and off with this guy's head, right.

8 “And his master praised the unrighteous steward 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.

The entire point of Jesus story to His disciples is on acting shrewdly. This guy may be crooked as a dog's hind leg, but you have to admit, he was shrewd. He leveraged someone else's money into a future he could spend.

That's business, as they say. That's what this world does, and frankly no one is surprised. My grandmother died 17 or 18 years ago and my mom died last year. They both voted for Joe Biden. I'm not surprised. The other guy's suing everybody because he lost. I'm not surprised. That's how this world rolls.

We are shrewd, and if you're not shrewd, you're a loser. Get with the program. Be shrewd or die, sucker. No surprises at all. Satan is ruler of this

world, and a bit of extortion and embezzlement never surprises us when we hear about it. We expect it in Satan's world system.

We're a little surprised that the Master sort of gives the guy a pass. Actually praises him. What a shrewd guy. Took my wealth and figured out a way to leverage it into his future welfare. Sounds exactly like what goes on every day in this cosmos. But now we're at the punch line. Jesus has a lesson in all of this He wants His disciples to hear and learn;

for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light

Ouch. Satan's dupes living in his cosmos, his world systems of darkness are smarter and shrewder than the elect who have been purchased out of this world and belong to God, but who still live here as aliens and foreigners.

Heaven is their new home. Their citizenship is effectively transferred. Sons of heaven who are aliens and strangers on this earth, according to Peter, but who have the power in this moment to gain wealth and invest it in their future.

Just like the unrighteous steward did in the story. Christians have the opportunity to invest wealth, that really doesn't even belong to them, it belongs to God, but we have the opportunity to invest wealth that's not ours in an investment that will pay out dividends . . . for eternity.

I drove the Model A coupe all the way to Montana. Went right by Marthe and Steve's house on my way to see a cousin of my mom's. And for many miles I kept seeing these signs on a fenceline that said Thousand Hills Ranch. Giant cattle outfit.

When I got to David's house I asked him, is that guy a christian? And he said, yeah, he goes to our church and he named that ranch that name because of Psalm 50 verse 10. I'll read it in context; vss 7 - 12

7 *“Hear, O My people, and I will speak;*

*O Israel, I will testify against you;
I am God, your God.*

*8 "I do not reprove you for your sacrifices,
And your burnt offerings are continually before Me.*

*9 "I shall take no young bull out of your house,
Nor male goats out of your folds.*

*10 "For every beast of the forest is Mine,
The cattle on a thousand hills.*

*11 "I know every bird of the mountains,
And everything that moves in the field is Mine.*

*12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you;
For the world is Mine, and all it contains.*

He named his ranch, Thousand Hills Ranch because God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. A shrewd son of light. But there aren't as many as there should be, and that's Jesus lesson.

Why is it that the sons of this cosmos are shrewd enough to pay it forward, but the sons of light rarely do that? God owns it all! But He graciously entrusts us with His wealth, and it would be nice, it would be great, if we were as smart as the sharks in this world, and leveraged wealth that doesn't belong to us into the future to pay us dividends forever.

Jesus isn't praising the crook. He's saying, I wish you guys were half as bright as the crook in the story! Take the wealth I lavish on you and pay some of it forward!

Wouldn't it be nice some day in heaven to see a brown guy walking toward you and he says, I've been waiting to meet you, because I wouldn't be here, except for those few bucks that you sent to India, that provided me with the

opportunity to hear the good news, and I believed . . . and thank you for doing that!

That treasure lasts for all eternity. That guy is glorifying Christ, with you, for eternity, and you had some little part in him being there to cast glory back onto Christ. You took money that didn't really belong to you, it all belongs to God, and you invested it in an enterprise that is declaring the Good News, and a voice is added to eternity, glorifying Christ, and you got to be part of the cause.

In 1949, as Jim Elliot was preparing for the mission field where he would be martyred in 1956, he wrote in his journal these words;

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep..to gain that which he cannot lose. Jim Elliot, 1949 I have that quote as my signature by-line on any of the forums where I participate. I'm a horse trader by nature. So my brain functions along the lines of this quote. Trade something that I can't keep to get something of permanent value? Who doesn't do that! Jim Elliot gave everything. He gave his life to gain a whole people for God's kingdom.

That's what Jesus parable is about. The crooked steward leverages something that isn't his to keep into future value that he can keep. And Jesus says, I wish you christians were as sharp as this crook. Leverage what you cannot keep to gain an eternal value that you can keep.

9 *“And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.*

What is the mammon of unrighteousness, and what is Jesus talking about here?

Mammon is the total of your accumulated wealth. Your worth in this world. If Pam and I made columns and added up a total value of our property, our savings, our investments, our stuff, including antiques, even our ordinary

furniture and our clothes, everything that combines to your final net worth, all of it is mammon.

Why does He call it the mammon of unrighteousness? Because it's the accumulation of value in this cosmos, this world system that belongs to the God of this world. Everything I just mentioned that gives us our combined net worth is perishing along with this world. It's what Paul called, wood, hay, stubble when he talks about what christians will lose and gain in judgement.

In fact that's a good place to look for a minute. 1 Corinthians 3:12

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. 11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

Paul is talking about what will last after the fires of judgement and what will not. Gold, silver, precious stones refers to the value of souls that are gained for the glory of God in this world. Wood, hay, stubble is all the other wealth that will not survive the fires of judgement.

But Jesus is saying, what if you could turn the stuff that's going to get burnt up anyways into real wealth that lasts for eternity. Do something shrewd like the crook in the story and leverage wealth that doesn't really belong to you into value that you can enjoy and spend forever.

9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

It's OK to ride around in a Model A station wagon. And it's doubtful that anyone else would enjoy that thing more than I do. But the other side of that coin is, what if I sold it for whatever I could get for it and invested that money in The Master's Academy International to train men in other lands how to rightly divide the word of truth so that they can in turn train others and a harvest of souls would begin.

And Jesus doesn't talk about if it fails, the mammon of unrighteousness, He says *when* it fails, because . . . it will. All of it will go up in smoke. Probably soon. Sooner if you live in the pine trees in California. Any time I think about wood, hay, and stubble I think about that wood car that I drive around in. It really is wood, hay and stubble.

Us old car hobby guys always see the pictures after the conflagration fires of the antique automobiles that are reduced to a puddle of melted metal and ashes. The wealth will fail. Every bit of it will be gone. Even if I die of a very old age and natural causes and someone else gets whatever's left, I can't take any of it with me. All of the mammon, all of the wealth is temporal. Poof, it's gone.

Especially those numbers floating in some computer. Poof! That's gone. Whatever the number at the end of all of my columns was when it all got added up, it's zero in heaven. All my treasure in this life . . . wood, hay, stubble.

Jesus says, the crooks in this world are smarter than you guys. At least this guy in the parable figured out a way to pay something forward to give him some kind of future after he's fired.

We have a clear pathway to invest in heaven, and we often choose to just consume our mammon on our own pleasures. The thieves are smarter than the christians.

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.

This is an axiom. You say, maybe that rich man was a bit hasty in firing that steward. Maybe with some more training and a second chance, that steward would prove to be faithful. What do you think? Nah.

But the same thing is true of christians. Paul writes to Timothy;
I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, 1Tim. 1:12

The reason Paul got to do what Paul got to do was because Jesus strengthened him and he responded with faithfulness, and for that reason, the Master put him into service. Faithfulness, unrighteousness, big things, small things.

I'm in the autumn of my life, and I'm trying desperately to be faithful in this tiny task of teaching you folks what little I know, week in and week out. Perhaps the day will come when the Lord says, I'm going to turn Tonopah upside down and inside out, and I'm going to bless that little faithful church I have there.

Little things! I haven't been as faithful as I wished. A lot of unfaithfulness. My dream is to finish well. My hearts desire is to be faithful.

11 "If therefore you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, 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?"

Sorry to have to break this to you. There is a direct connection between what you do with your money and spiritual fruit. It's a reciprocal relationship. Here's how it works.

God gives you the power to generate income. He knows we have necessities we need. Food and clothing. A roof to keep the rain and snow off of us. He blesses us with the ability to provide services that have value so that we can buy the things we need.

That money is His. You thought it was yours didn't you. Whatever the Government let you keep after they took their cut, you thought that was yours. It isn't. It all belongs to God. But God blesses you with money to spend on the things that are necessary.

All of us are like the steward in the story. We're doing business with money that doesn't belong to us. It's God's money. And sadly, most of us are like the steward. We aren't spending God's money in a way that gives a return on the investment to Him.

God doesn't fire you when you squander all of His money on yourself and your pleasures. But neither does He bless you with fruit that will last for eternity.

11 "If therefore you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, 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?"

Those are sobering words. My 5 minutes are about up. Do I have friends on the other side who are going to welcome me into eternity because of what I did with the mammon that doesn't even belong to me anyways? I fear, not many. I fear, not many at all.

The sad thing is, we could give so much more than we do and it's revenue neutral because you can't outgive God. We truly aren't very shrewd business people with the business of heaven. It's the best deal on earth, and most christians aren't taking advantage. Jesus says, I wish you guys were half as shrewd as the crooks in this world.

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

I looked for a long time at the greek - english interliner where you have the english translation above and connected to the greek words. What an interesting passage.

For those who are blessed enough to have had time to come to Mike and Debbie Baca's house of prayer on the first saturday of each month, you will no doubt recall that it is the practice of Mr. Baca to conclude our prayer time by reading from the book of Joshua; 24:14,15

14 *“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 “And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”*

Joshua gives some options. Choose who you will serve. Option 1 if serving God is dis-agreeable, serve the gods of egypt. Or, option 2 serve the gods of the amorites who populate this land you are in.

Jesus at the conclusion of His parable about the unrighteous steward who pays someone else's money forward for him to spend in the future says the same thing Joshua said to the children of Israel 1400 years earlier.

Choose who you will serve. Well, you say, I'm going to just be neutral for now and maybe later I'll decide to maybe serve God a little more. I'm sort of leaning towards serving God.

Let me read you what the greek interliner version of this verse says.

“No servant can be the slave of two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot be the slave of God and this world's wealth.

The concept is identical to what Joshua said. You cannot opt out of slavery in

this world. You can only choose what you will be the slave of. Joshua's options were other gods.

Jesus option is worldly wealth. The world's stuff. It's the same thing. To be a slave of this world's wealth and this world's stuff is just as idolatrous as worshipping the gods of Egypt or the gods of Canaan.

One day Satan offered Jesus all of the mammon. Everything in the whole world, it could all be His if He would just worship Satan. Everything. All of it. We're struggling to put away a few measly shaky bucks for a retirement account but Jesus got offered everything. The whole world! Yeah, He said no.

Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

Someone has said, that in an 80 year lifetime, you'll spend 50 years thinking about money. Stop it! It isn't your money. Serve God and let the money take care of itself.

It takes a real faith to understand and believe that tangible money that you can spend here and enjoy somewhat before it all perishes along with you, can be invested in another world that we can only just imagine a little bit.

Jesus says, be like this crook. Take money that isn't yours and leverage the value of that money into your future life in another place. Give your money to Christian enterprises that are actually spreading the good news of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

And you will have people waiting to welcome you into heaven that are there because that money that wasn't yours that you couldn't keep helped them hear the good news.

And you will also have had a small part in adding voices to the choir that will sing praises and glory to God . . . forever.