

## THE PARABLES OF JESUS, #031 A Chronological Study

*"To Him who opened His mouth in parables and  
uttered things hidden since the creation of the world."  
Psalm 78:2*



### **"The Dishonest Manager"** **Luke 16:1-13** <sup>i</sup>

---

#### **The Unrighteous Steward**

Time-line wise, this parable follows on the heels of The Lost Sheep, Coin and Sons. Jesus' message was all about the importance of understanding the love of God for His Chosen and the lengths He will go to acquire them into His kingdom.

We shouldn't forget that his followers have different reasons for being with Him at this time. First, are His disciples, and here we find 11 righteous followers and 1 unrighteous one (Judas

Iscariot). Second, we have a mix of mostly Jewish followers – some who will indeed join with Jesus in faith, and many who will not. And third, there are the religious leaders – mostly Pharisees – who are seeking to catch Jesus breaking their precious traditions, based upon the rewriting of God’s word – that in no way represents what God means or how He feels. These traditions place a tremendous burden upon those who live under them (like limiting how far you can walk on the Sabaoth in order to stay “holy”).

Now we will be introduced to the characters of this parable.

## **JESUS SETS THE STAGE**

### **THE TEXT**

**Luke 16:1-13 [NASB]**

***1 Now He was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager,***

This is not, and was not, an uncommon relationship. Many who acquire wealth do not have the time or expertise to keep track of it all. So, someone, a “CFO,” is hired who excels at these skills.

***and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions.***

This is another not uncommon problem in similar cases, where the manager takes advantage of his master’s wealth in order to benefit himself unrighteously.

Neither the rich man nor the manager are spoken of as being righteous people. We will be talking about a “**principle**” and not about the story told.

***2 And he (the rich man) called him (the manager) and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'***



Our manager is now in a position where by he must stay long enough to “account” for his poor management, and following that he will be let go.

---

### **THE UNRIGHTEOUS MANAGER’S THOUGHTS**

***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.***

Now our manager is terribly worried. He’s never “worked” for a living. He’s not strong enough to dig ditches and since he’s been working for the rich... he’s ashamed to have to beg for a living.

***4 I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.’***

“A-Ha,” the manager says, “I know what I shall do.” He decides that the proper action, in order to protect himself and his position for his future, is to lower the debt owed to the rich man to ingratiate himself to the debtors and he would be welcomed by them (perhaps in a new managerial relationship).

We will expand on this, but just now consider how quickly he uses his worldly skills to begin to make a place for himself in a future business relationship with perhaps one of his master’s debtors.

---

### **THE UNRIGHTEOUS MANAGER’S ACTIONS**

***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.’***

So our manager goes and halves one debtor’s debt and cuts a second one’s debt by 20 percent, thus placing himself in their favor. Notice his skill and speed in using his worldly knowledge in order to ingratiate himself to his master’s debtors.

---

## **THE RICH MAN FINDS OUT EVERYTHING**

***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.***

The shrewd manager lowered the amounts owed to the rich man and they paid that amount – thus, the manager was able to mark his master’s books as their debts being paid. This made the debtors happy. He fully expected that his master would not notice that he had “cooked the books.”

But, he didn’t get away with it. His master had been warned about his unrighteous financial activities which benefited himself at his master’s expense.

Then, unexpectedly, the rich man praises the actions of the manager for being shrewd (having or showing sharp powers of judgment; astute) in making his way forward towards acquiring his next employment by wining favor with his former bosses’ debtors.

So here we have to stop and process this parable as it has gone thus far. This is a story about a man (the manager) who was unrighteous in dealing with his master’s money in order to benefit



himself. He was caught at it, and then acting unrighteous he paved the way to continue benefiting himself after his master fires him.

**In Luke 16:8b** - The key to this parable is found in this line, "***the sons of this age are more shrewd*** (having or showing sharp powers of judgment – Astute) ***in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.***"

Jesus is giving us an example of how people in the world look out for themselves and their endeavors in a way that God's people often neglect.

Unless we see the positive side of this story so far... we will not understand Jesus' parable. A man acted in such a way that his goals were going to be met when his current job came to an end.

Jesus is saying that it is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light (His children).

"Jugglers and fiddlers, and circus-riders and dancers, criminals, purely worldly men and women of business, and people of that sort spend far more time upon efforts to perfect themselves in their profession, than ninety-nine out of every hundred professing Christians do to make themselves true and mature followers of Jesus Christ. In their world they know that nothing is to be got without working for it, and there is nothing to be got in the Christian life without working for it any more than in any other." ii

---

## THE MASTER ADVISES

Jesus then turns to the crowd and says:

***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 (their) eternal dwellings.***

This is the hard verse for us to understand.

We need to understand that neither the rich man nor the manager are identified as being righteous. This parable is not about **who they are**. It is about **what they did**.

Let me offer a quick paraphrase of verse 9 that will help us understand what's being said here:

***And I say to you, Christian, or at the time righteous Jew, make friends for yourselves in this world of unrighteousness (leading them to Christ, or back to God's Word for the Jew) by using that which is most valuable (valuable righteous knowledge and skills) in this world that is full of unrighteousness... so that when the unrighteousness fails, they (those who have turned to Christ, returned to God's Word) will receive you into their eternal dwellings.***

Arm yourself with that which is of the high biblical standards, and then don't separate yourself from those around you because of their unrighteousness! Make friends with the unrighteous around you so that you can minister to them. When their unrighteousness fails them... you and the Gospel will be there to bring them to belief, and then they will receive you and because of that reception you will be welcomed into their righteous eternal dwellings.



**WHY?**

**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.**

Jesus is speaking about shrewdness. It is a **quality** in this parable. The **shrewd** one who is faithful in a very little unrighteous thing will also be faithful in the very big unrighteous thing. Unsaid is the opposite of these things. The **shrewd** one who is faithful in a very little righteous thing will also be U in very big righteous thing. It is a pattern that is always followed. If an unrighteous person becomes saved, and they are a shrewd person, they will become a shrewd saved person. They will think and act according to their natural nature. A shrewd unsaved person will be a shrewd saved person. A lazy unsaved person will be a lazy saved person.

---

**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?**

Jesus goes on and speaks about the lack of shrewdness. Who would trust you with great riches is you are unfaithful. Then Jesus asks the really big question, "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?"

Consider this: A young man grows up in a wealthy family. He's not shrewd in using his money to better himself or save for his future, or help others. His parents write him out of their will, and when they are gone, he will have nothing, and no one will help him, for he would not help others.

And then consider this: A young saved man grows up in a wealthy family. He's shrewd in using His money to better himself and save for his future, and he uses his money to help others, he suffers a financial failure (no fault of his own). He has his savings, help from his family, and help from all his friends whom he has helped along the way.

The story will be very much the same for anyone regardless of their original financial condition. A person's nature, is a person's nature.

---

***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."***

In the background of our current world is the seeming truth that, "It's all about the power or the money!" For the Christian, it should all be about who is in the Lamb's "Book of Life," and how can I help get them, during their lifetime, into the Kingdom of God.

Just after this parable comes, "The Rich man and Lazarus" (Luke 16:19-31), Jesus encourages good stewardship – especially in the division between living a Christian life for Jesus, or living for money, power, and material things. As believers we have no excuse for not knowing what God expects of us, basically the same bottom line as this current study.

I see two important threads in these parables. One is about the dangers of serving the god of wealth. So much about those who serve wealth are steeped in selfishness, materialism, and self-importance. Do you remember the stories from the great stock market crash in the late 1930s? Do you remember those who



took their own lives when they lost everything? It still happens today. Serving money and things can make you happy – but not forever.

The second thread is all about being “shrewd” as a Christian, where the center of your attention is being prepared for entering God’s kingdom. The shrewd Christian will spend their time in the Word of God, focusing upon Jesus Christ, as He is the focus of the Scriptures.

**YOUR SHREWDNESS** - Are you spending the same energy, in your occupation, your work, those secular things that you so love, as you spend your energy and shrewdness for Christ. Which is more important to you?... Your self-interest or the ministry of Christ. Is it the studying, teaching, and telling the world around you about Jesus or do you spend your time and energy towards your career, occupation, and money? Will many who have found Jesus through some element of your love for them come to meet you in God’s kingdom, welcoming you joyfully, receiving you into “*their eternal dwellings?*”

Jesus promises to reward us for being shrewd – for Him. The Lord isn’t above encouraging us to do the right thing for reasons that will ultimately benefit ourselves. This is why He talks so often about the kind of behavior that God rewards:

1. ***“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:3-4).***
2. ***“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (Luke 6:38).***

A final example: If someone gives you a \$20 bill... will you use it to buy something that will make you happy for a moment or invest it in something that will please the Lord. Using what the Lord has given freely to you for the benefit of others, even if you get rewarded for it... is the kind of self-serving behavior that Jesus actually encourages.

---



***FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS***

- 1. What is the difference between a bible story and a parable?**
  
  - 2. Why is Jesus telling this parable?**
  
  - 3. Verses 10-13 teach an important lesson, what is it?**
-

## ***FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS***

### **1. What is the difference between a bible story and a parable?**

A Bible story usually contains names of individuals that are related to the surrounding text. A story is about a subject that, in most instances, has actually happened.

A parable is "a story cast alongside" as an illustration that will teach a certain lesson to a set of people in the audience of the teller. In Jesus' parables, quite often there are more than one audience group that is listening and the formulation of the parable will speak a different message to each group – for instance, what the faithful followers of Jesus hear will be a message concerning the importance in their lives for the gospel. Then there are the general followers of Jesus who will hear a "general" interpretation of what Jesus is telling them, and finally there are those in the audience who have been sent to catch Jesus violating either the Law of God, or the Traditions of the elders (the Talmud). They will be listening with the intention of catching Him. So they are not listening for His deeper message, but listening for that which may violate their laws and traditions.

### **2. Why is Jesus telling this parable?**

Jesus is talking about how people of the world react to troubling situations. In this case a rich man and his financial manager. Jesus tells us that the manager is basically stealing money from the rich man for his own use. The rich man find out that this is the case and intends to fire his financial manager. The manager then uses his worldly skills to ensure that he will be received for another job position.

He wants us to see that people react with skill and motivation in order to preserve their money and power. He goes on to say that generally righteous people rarely respond with the kind of



motivation that an unrighteous person uses to advance their own position. In our story, the rich man praises the unrighteous actions that the manager uses to protect himself and his interests. Jesus then makes the connection that wouldn't it be great if believers used as much ingenuity in keeping their ministries and gospel endeavors productive during difficulties.

### **3. Verses 10-13 teach an important lesson, what is it?**

If you are an unfaithful person – who will trust you? If you are unfaithful in little things, then you will be unfaithful in the big things of life as well. If you are faithful in the little things, then you will be faithful in the big things of life as well – you are who you are. You decide where your faithfulness resides. Faithfulness should be at or near the top of your qualities and make that faithfulness count for serving your Master, Jesus. You can't serve the Power and Money of this world as your master... and be faithful to the Lord Jesus. You can only serve One Master - let it be Jesus.

---

The "The Ancient Path" Study materials on this website are made available here free and may be copied for use in Bible study groups, in limited numbers, providing that no charge is made for them. Items that appear as copyrighted materials that are not of our authorship are not to be copied without the express permission the original copyright holders. Every effort has been made to give proper footnote credit for items that are quoted.

J. Deering [AncientPath.net] is the author and editor of this study.

AncientPath.net © 2023

Jeremiah 18:15

"Don't stumble from the Ancient Path"

2023-11-29 updated

---

<sup>i</sup> All Scriptures are from the New American Standard Bible (1995)

<sup>ii</sup> MacLaren's Expositions of the Holy Scripture, quoted on biblehub.com, Luke 16:8