

# Luke 16

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Jesus continues to teach His disciples with His outspoken critics, the Pharisees, looking on and disputing. He had words for them, too.

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## JESUS' STORY ABOUT A SHREWD MANAGER

**(16:1.) Jesus told this story to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a manager handling his affairs. One day a report came that the manager was wasting his employer's money. (2) So the employer called him in and said, 'What's this I hear about you? Get your report in order, because you are going to be fired.'**

- The **rich man** owned a large estate and **had a manager** to care for business affairs. He must have been a free man because he was not punished or sold because of his faulty work. The **manager** had mismanaged the farm and was fired. He was asked to provide an accounting of his work.

**(3.) "The manager thought to himself, 'Now what? My boss has fired me. I don't have the strength to dig ditches, and I'm too proud to beg. (4) Ah, I know how to ensure that I'll have plenty of friends who will give me a home when I am fired.'**

- The **manager's** options were to work in the field or **beg**. He was too weak for the one and too proud for the other.

- The third option was to adjust the balances that were owed to his master.

**(5.) "So he invited each person who owed money to his employer to come and discuss the situation. He asked the first one, 'How much do you owe him?' (6) The man replied, 'I owe him 800 gallons of olive oil.' So the manager told him, 'Take the bill and quickly change it to 400 gallons. '**

- The manager wanted to put the debtors in debt to himself so he would be invited into their homes when he was unemployed.
- **Olive oil** was used for cooking, and to fuel lamps. It was also used as a medicine and an agent for skin care. The departing manager told the debtor to mark down his debt 50% or **400 gallons** of **olive oil**.

**(7.) "And how much do you owe my employer?" he asked the next man. 'I owe him 1,000 bushels of wheat,' was the reply. 'Here,' the manager said, 'take the bill and change it to 800 bushels. ' (8) "The rich man had to admire the dishonest rascal for being so shrewd. And 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.**

- **McGarvey** sees a form of share-cropping here because the debtor was setting the price owed (vs. 7).
- The man owing for **wheat** was given a 20% mark-down.
- The master praised the unrighteous manager for planning ahead. While it was dishonest, it was **shrewd** and showed planning.

**(9.) Here's the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.**

- Jesus uses the story to teach the lesson of using **worldly resources** for the Lord.
- When it is time to die, we will be welcomed into the **eternal home** by those we helped on earth.

**(10.) "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities.**



- Jesus does not endorse the dishonesty of the steward, but instead draws another lesson: be honest with whatever we have entrusted to us.
- When we have the responsibility of the Lord's treasury, we must be careful with it. Some take the attitude that someone else is paying for it.

**(11.) And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? (12) And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?**

- **Worldly wealth** is money. **True riches** are in the kingdom; items such as peace, contentment, forgiveness and joy.
- **Other people's things** highlights the truth that we are only stewards of our money, not the absolute owner. **Barclay** makes a useful observation: "The lesson is that a man's way of fulfilling a small task is the best proof of his fitness or unfitness to be entrusted with a bigger task. That is clearly true of earthly things. No man will be advanced to higher office until he has given proof of his honesty and ability in a smaller position. But Jesus extends the principle to eternity. He says, 'Upon earth you are in charge of things which are not really yours. You cannot take them with you when you die. They are only lent to you. You are only a steward over them. They cannot, in the nature of

things, be permanently yours. On the other hand, in heaven you will get what is really and eternally yours. And what you get in heaven depends on how you use the things of earth. What you will be given as your very own will depend on how you use the things of which you are only steward.”

- **Paul Butler** makes a like point: “Someone has wisely pointed out that money is merely a medium of exchange for a man’s life. Man spends his time, talent and energy at a vocation and receives in exchange some medium —usually money. By spending that money a man exchanges his life for whatever he considers worthy of his life. If a man hoards his money or spends it all indulging himself it manifests a selfish, uncaring heart.”

**(13.) "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."**

- One **master** is **money**, the other is **God**. Dual allegiance is not possible over time. It failed for Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:

**But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest. Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!" (Acts 5:1-4)**

## THE PHARISEES SCOFFED AT JESUS

**(14.) The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at Him.**

- The teaching was understood all too well. As a class, the **Pharisees** were **money** centered. Money, to them, was a symbol of God's approval of their lifestyle and views. Jesus was not put down by **scoffers**. He kept focused on doing what His Father wanted.

**(15.) Then He said to them, "You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God.**

- **McGarvey** wrote:

The Pharisees lived in such outward contrast to the publicans and made such pretensions and claims that men esteemed them righteous, but they were none the less abominable in God's sight. God approves righteousness when inward, but despises the mere outward show of it.

- Their standing with others was very important to them. To **God**, it was **detestable**.

## OBEY THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

**(16.) "Until John the Baptist, the law of Moses and the messages of the prophets were your guides. But now the Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is eager to get in.**

**(17) But that doesn't mean that the law has lost its force. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the smallest point of God's law to be overturned. (18) "For example, a man who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery. And anyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."**

- Before **John the Baptist**, God's truth came from **the Law and the Prophets**. God's will is always written down. Beginning with **John**, the message has been the coming **kingdom** and some have tried to force their own way into this new **kingdom** by taking over.
- Jesus affirmed (vs. 17) the word-for-word accuracy of the **Law**. It was not folklore or borrowed from pagan documents. Those who downgrade Genesis are ignoring the teaching of Jesus in this sentence.
- The teaching about **divorce** is inserted here because it is a sample of how the **Law** was not being kept by those who claimed to specialized in keeping **the law of Moses**.

### THE PRICE OF IGNORING THE POOR

**(19.) Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury.**

- This story is often mislabeled as a parable.
  - The characters in parables did not have names as we find here: Lazarus, Abraham, Moses.
  - The story is not parallel to something greater. A *parable* is defined as one story thrown down beside another to teach a spiritual truth.
  - Verse 30 shows that the story belongs to the other world. Since we are not familiar with the basic story, how could it illustrate a second world?
- This **rich man** had the finest **clothes** and lived a life of **splendor**. **Purple and fine linen** were the most expensive garments.

**(20.) At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. (21) As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps**

from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores.

- The estate was surrounded by a wall because it had a **gate**. Friends or relatives **laid Lazarus** at the **gate** to beg as wealthy people came and went. Disease or poor hygiene caused Lazarus to be **covered with sores**. **Lazarus longed for scraps from the rich man's table**. He wanted the **rich man's** garbage.
- He was so weak that he could not prevent the **dogs** of the street from **licking his sores**. These were his only servants in contrast to the man of wealth.

(22.) "Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, (23) and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side.

- **The poor man's** life ended in **death**, but there is no reference to a burial. The transport of his soul was by **angels** with **Abraham's** presence being the destination. He had a place of honor at the great feast of heaven.
- The rich man had a **burial** following his **death**. It was apt to have been one suitable for his place in life. But the **angels** were absent. His soul went to **place of the dead**. In this case it was **torment**.
- The rich man's eyesight worked and he could see **Lazarus** and **Abraham**.

## ABRAHAM CAN'T HELP

(24.) "The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.'

- The **rich man** wanted **pity**, but it was too late. He had not shown **pity** to **Lazarus** when he could have. It is better to beg

bread on this earth than to beg for a drop of water in eternity. **The rich man** wanted control of **Lazarus**, but that was not possible. He wanted relief from his **anguish**, and that was not possible.

**(25.) "But Abraham said to him, 'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish."**

- **Abraham** acknowledges the rich man as a Jewish descent when he calls him **Son**. The once-rich man had called him "Father Abraham" in verse 24. Clearly, praying to a saint does not work. But Abraham also points out the permanent role reversal.

**(26.) And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.'**

- An added reason that relief cannot happen is because of the **chasm**. There is no crossing over. This rules out the teaching of purgatory where people are punished, then saved. It also rules out the idea of a second chance following death. Now is our opportunity to get things right with the Lord and keep them right.

**(27.) "Then the rich man said, 'Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father's home. (28) For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don't end up in this place of torment.'**

- The one-time **rich man** is now interested in his **five brothers**. Wealth and family connections have no bearing on eternity.
- There is a conscious state between death and the resurrection of the dead. There is no annihilation (the dead wish it were so).

- **The rich man's** request implies that he didn't know this punishment was coming, but he wants to head off his **five brothers** from coming here.

**(29.) "But Abraham said, 'Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.'**

- **Abraham** replied that the **brothers** had the Scriptures. God spoke through them. The once-wealthy man and his **brothers** had the same **Moses and the prophets** to read as anyone else. Men are to live by the revelation furnished by God. There is no revelations tailored to individuals.
- No warning is available from beyond the grave.

### **LISTEN TO THE SCRIPTURES**

**(30.) "The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.' (31) "But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead.'"**

- **The rich man** didn't want his brothers to read Scripture, he wanted personal testimony from beyond death. Jesus himself later returned from death, but not many were persuaded.
- **William Barclay** adds: It seems hard that his request that his brothers should be warned was refused. But it is the plain fact that if men possess the truth of God's word, and if, wherever they look, there is sorrow to be comforted, need to be supplied pain to be relieved, and it moves them to no feeling and to no action, nothing will change them.
- Also later, a different man also named Lazarus was raised from the dead and the chief priests made plans to kill him. John 12:10.

### **A Summary in Rhyme**

The rich man had a manager wasteful  
Who's own wants were very tasteful.  
The manager, before he was fired  
Made arrangements to be desired.  
He told the boss' debtors  
To loosen their payment fetters  
Jesus called him wise to plan  
As his future he did scan.  
The Pharisees thought life was all about wealth  
But Jesus said the Word was the source of health.  
The Rich Man had the best of everything  
Ignoring the beggar without anything.  
Mr. Rich met death and was buried  
While the beggar to reward was carried.  
Mr. Rich could see the meal he missed  
Asking Abraham to help and assist.  
He learned that each must let the Bible reign  
In order to miss this terrible place of pain.

—by Charles Dailey