

Shrewd Stewardship

Luke 16:1–15 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: Several times in the Gospels, Jesus uses bad examples to teach good lessons.

- He compares His return to the coming of a thief in the night in Matthew 24.
- He commands His followers to be wise as serpents in Matthew 10.
- He likened God to an unjust, unbelieving judge in Luke 18, who was swayed by a widow's persistent request.

Today's text is the penultimate case where Jesus uses a bad example to teach a good lesson.

In fact, this sort of text is one of the reasons so many pastors choose not to preach through books of the Bible these days. But, one of the advantages to attending a church where the pastor simply preaches the Bible as it is, is that they cannot skip the difficult passages. We have found at this church that ***“God often hides His most glorious jewels deep within the most difficult mines”***.

Another reason that pastors skip this sort of passage is because it deals with money or mammon. But if you aren't willing to speak on the proper use of money, you will have a difficult time finding material to preach from the Gospels. According to Pastor John MacArthur, “Of the nearly forty parables told by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels, about one-third of them deal in some way with money.”¹

Money is such an intimate expression of value that it shows, better than anything else in all the world, what we truly value and worship. If you want to know who or what you worship, don't look at the emotions of your singing, or the doctrinal statement you affirm, look at your bank statement.

CONTEXT: Remember the context of the previous passages. Luke's material has revolved around VALUE PROPOSITIONS—namely, the value of CHRIST over competing IDOLS.

We said two weeks ago that worship was just that an appropriation of value. The word *worship* comes from the old English meaning “worth ship”. Praise has the same root as appraisal. We are created to be VALUE-driven creators, and we are called to set an ultimate value on God Himself. Yet, the enemy's chief priority is to redirect our worship away from GOD onto IDOLS.

¹ John MacArthur, [Luke 11–17](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2013), 332.

Jesus loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to lose you to an idol, so throughout the Scriptures, you see this war on idolatry. Today's text is just that. He draws His conclusion in verse 13 - You cannot serve God and money. Some translations will say, "mammon".

Mammon was associated with the Greek God Plutos. In one of the ancient texts called the Realm of Plutos we read where Plutos said, "I call myself 'king of this world and worldlings'--Great Mammon--the greatest power on earth. Riches, renown, honour, estate, and all the goods of this world, for which men incessantly toil and moil, flow forth from me in abundance. If you will deign to serve and follow me, all these mountains of gold shall be at your command, and if these will not suffice, you shall have ten times as much."

Plutos was said to dwell in the desert wilderness. Remember, Jesus went into the desert wilderness to battle Satan, and while there, he was offered all the kingdoms of the world and their wealth in exchange for worship. Jesus refused.

Jesus is making the point in today's text...the chief idol that you will be tempted to VALUE over God is *mammon*, worldly wealth. However, ***there is a type of spiritual JUDO that Jesus conveys in the text, where you can use the tool of the enemy against him.***

TEXT: Luke 16:1–15 (ESV)

In verse one we see...

1. A Good Lesson from a Shrewd Steward

¹ "He also said to the disciples, 'There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions'."

So, the idea is that a wealthy landowner had employed a number of stewards or managers to oversee his operations. The steward was expected to use the produce from the land to generate a profit for the master. But one of the stewards had begun to get sloppy and was wasting the master's possession.

The phrasing in Greek suggests that someone brought an accusation against the steward that he was not only poorly managing the master's goods, but he was also slandering the master. The word *Diabolo* (**reported**) is used, related to the noun *diabolos*, which means "slanderer" or "accuser," and is the word translated as "devil." *Diabolo* means "to accuse" or "bring charges" with a hostile intent.

² "And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager'."

This equates to something like a two-week notice and a foolish one at that. If someone has proven disloyal, you don't allow them to settle out the accounts. You get rid of them, then clean up the mess afterward.

³ “And 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, and I am ashamed to beg.’

In other words, if he fires me, I will have to get a real job. That can't happen! Beyond that, when word spreads of my disloyalty people in the community will shun me. I will end up a beggar.

⁴ ‘I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’

So he has a scheme, a plan, so that when the master dismisses him, he will have a community of friends who think that he is an awesome guy.

⁵ “So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty’.”

A hundred measures of oil was somewhere between 900 and 1000 gallons. Producing it would have required 3 years of labor and 50 to 100 olive trees, so this is an immense sum. The manager cuts the cost in half.

⁷ “Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’

A hundred measures of wheat would have been equivalent to eight to ten years' wages for a common laborer. Discounting that price by 20% was quite the gesture of friendship.

When it was all said and done, the dishonest manager ended up costing the master a great sum of money. Perhaps he thought, my master has so much He will never miss it!

The best indication we have of the inordinate wealth of the master is his response.

⁸ ‘The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.’

The master didn't condemn him, he commended him for his shrewdness.

What had the steward done? He used money that he was going to lose either way so that he would gain friends when the money was gone.

He traded FINANCIAL capital for RELATIONAL capital.

In the words of that famous missionary Jim Elliot, “He gave up what he could not keep to gain that which he could not lose.”

Then Jesus adds his commentary at the end of verse 8.

8b. “For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. ⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”

What is the Lord saying? He is teaching us that there is a way for us to leverage money for eternity.

You see, the money you hold is a stewardship. It belongs to God. You must account for what you did with His stuff.

Do you know how much of it you will leave behind when life is over? 100%. You cannot take a dime with you.

But, it is possible, to take that wealth and leverage it in such a way that you have eternal friends when it is all said and done.

You can give up what you cannot keep to gain that which he could not lose.”

You can trade FINANCIAL capital for RELATIONAL and SPIRITUAL capital.

ILLUSTRATION: As many of you know I came to Christ accidentally. I was scrolling through the stations looking for music when I came across the preaching of Charles Stanley. I thought it was the news so I stopped and listened. Long story short, the Holy Spirit used his message to point me to Jesus. For years, I wanted to meet him and thank him, and I had the opportunity. However, the older I got, the more I realized that Dr. Stanley did his part, but someone else paid for the airtime that brought the message to me. The day came when I met the station manager, and interestingly Maximum Life airs daily on that same station in north Alabama. A couple of years ago, he told me that one individual paid for Dr. Stanley’s air time, and he had recently passed away. He never wanted people to know that he had given; it was between him and the Lord. But I do know his name now, and when I get to Heaven, he will be among the first people I find and embrace. That man will always have a seat at my table in glory.

Not only a good lesson from a shrewd steward but secondly...

2. A Good Return from a Shrewd Investment

¹⁰ “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the

unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?"

Ownership is an illusion. Over and over, scripture teaches that God owns it all.

- **Psalm 24:1** — “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”
- **Leviticus 25:23** — “The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.”
- **1 CORINTHIANS 10:26** "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness."
- **COLOSSIANS 1:16** “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.”
- **GENESIS 14:18,19,22** “Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. 19 And he blessed him and said: ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth’; 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth,...’
- **PSALM 50:10 NKJ** 10 “For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.”

In his classic work, “**The Screwtape Letters**”, **C.S. Lewis** quotes his chief demon as saying, “*Humans are always putting up claims to ownership which sound equally funny in heaven and in hell.*” Can you imagine that - every time we declare something mine, both the devils and the angels giggle.

You say, “Well, preacher, I thought God said 10% was His”. The tithe is **UNIQUELY** His, it is to be brought into the storehouse for the furtherance of His work. But the Bible makes it clear - God owns it all. What we do with the money He entrusts to us is something we must give an account for.

Jesus says, leverage the wealth God has entrusted to you for eternity. It is the ultimate ROI!

I remember when I surrendered to ministry, I honestly didn’t understand that preachers received a check. I was offended the first time someone offered me a check for preaching. But, I will never forget what an older preacher told me once. He said, “Son, preaching doesn’t pay that much - but the retirement plan is out of this world.”

Well in the same way, when you give to further the work of the Kingdom - you are amassing a fortune in Glory!

A good lesson from a shrewd steward, a good return for a shrewd investment.

3. A Good Principle from a Shrewd Teacher

The principle Jesus teaches us here is profound and powerful. He directs it toward money, but it has implications for literally every realm of life.

¹³ “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

No one understood the human heart better than the one who designed it.

Jesus designed your heart to be very poor at multi-tasking. You can love one thing ultimately, that's it.

The moment you begin to put something else in the place where only Christ belongs, you will no longer be able to love Christ less... your heart won't let you. You will begin to hate Him.

Typically, the hatred will not be directed at him personally, but it will be directed at His truth. You will hate the teaching of Scripture. You will hate those who love Jesus.

ILLUSTRATION: I am sure you've seen by now the mockery of the Last Supper at the opening ceremony of the Olympics. Please understand - when they began to put drag queens, transgenders, and homosexuals at the center of the universe... the only alternative is to HATE CHRIST.

That is how the human heart works.

ILLUSTRATION: When a man places another woman in the place that only his wife belongs, soon he will develop a frustration and a hatred for his wife.

That tendency is not a FLAW but a FEATURE.

¹⁴ “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.”

See it? They hear the truth of God from the very Son of God Himself and they ridicule. Why? Because something else is in the place where only God belongs.

¹⁵ “And he said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God’.”

ILLUSTRATION: What would you say was the occupation of Satan? Scripture teaches that he was a worship leader in heaven, right? He dwelt in Judas, who was a money

manager. In some ways he is a preacher and a politician. But I think the thing he does best is real estate. He understands real estate law better than anyone else.

When he seeks a place in your heart, he doesn't come after the entire thing; that's too costly. Instead, he seeks to own the centermost acreage. Why? Because if he holds the center of your heart, that gives him the right of way to everything else.

INVITATION/CONCLUSION: Who sits on the throne of your heart today? What is at the very center? Is it Jesus Christ? Or is it something else?