

## Luke 16:1-18 Money, Marriage and Hades Pt1

The great expositional chapter: deals with money, divorce, and Abraham's bosom/Hades

The parable of the unjust steward is considered one of the most difficult in all of Scripture, it's a little difficult to understand at first, but as I have studied it, I think the key to understanding once again, is context.

In ch 15 Jesus points out that God cares about people who are lost without Him, He cares about those who don't live clean cut lives, people who have blown it – He wants them to know that He is willing and able to forgive them and to receive them as His own. But the Pharisees and scribes, the religious crowd, the 'church folk' of the day, didn't want these people coming around. Why not?

**Because they are just concerned with themselves** as Jesus makes clear. He tells the parable of the man who lost one sheep and the woman who lost one coin to show how God cares about the lost, then He told the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

The point of all of this is to show the value of the lost and God's willingness to receive those who are completely defiled and rebellious once they have been broken and recognize their sins.

But the parable also shows the attitude of the religious crowd through the elder brother who isn't so happy to see the father welcome the younger brother home. The older brother was just concerned **with himself** with his own performance and was stuck on why he hadn't ever gotten a party.

The older brother resented Dad's generosity and complained about the fact that although he had stayed home and worked hard, dad had never given him anything. Which was a wrong understanding on his part – the father pointed out that everything dad owned was available to the older son, but that it wasn't just for selfish uses, it was also to use in celebrating and blessing others.

So now, right on the heels of this story, Jesus is going to deal with the issue a little deeper. He turns and addresses the disciples and He talks to them about the importance of using your life to serve God and others and NOT to be self-absorbed in all your goals and conduct like the older brother and the religious crowd he represented.

### I. (1- 8) The story – the steward who took care of his future

1He 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.2And 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.'3And 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.4I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may

receive me into their houses.’<sup>5</sup>So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’<sup>6</sup>He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’<sup>7</sup>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.’<sup>8</sup>The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

1. What’s going on here?

- a. The master – manager/steward relationship: he took care of everything; but this one isn’t doing a good job, he’s accused of “wasting” the owner’s possessions. Not keeping tight books. So the master calls him in to give a final accounting before he is removed from office.
- b. The plan – he’s a delicate man, afraid of doing some hard work, afraid he won’t be able to find another job of his stature and style of life, so he cooks up a scheme to ingratiate others to him so he’ll have some favors to collect on when he is removed from office.
  - i. He calls in the master’s debtors and reworks the books.
  - ii. Oil – 100 measures of oil = 875 gallons, the annual production of approximately 150 trees – so this is a large debt; the going rate for this oil would equal about 1000 denarii so it equates to roughly three years labor for a hired man. This is cut in half by the steward.
  - iii. Wheat – 100 measures of wheat = the yield of about 100 acres of land; worth about 2500 – 3000 denarii or the equivalent of around 8-10 years labor for a hired man. This is reduced by 20% by the steward.
  - iv. He tells them to sit down and re-write their bills. All paperwork, if you could call it that, at this time was done by hand. Basically what these guys are writing out are hand-written promissory notes, a kind of IOU that was completely binding back in the day.
- c. The master’s response – The master finds out about what is going on and actually commends the steward. He likes what he sees – this kind of innovation and ingenuity. He obviously has the power to go back and reset the debts, and he might even be thinking of keeping the steward on staff after all – a little devious fellow like that, rightly employed, could be of great benefit to his master – you’d just have to keep a real close eye on him.

So, but why is Jesus telling us all of this? Because, he says, “the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.” They are just looking out for themselves, so they use their lives and their resources to ‘look out for number one’ but this shouldn’t be the case with people who love Jesus.

He's making a contrasting observation here – showing His disciples what to do by pointing out what not to do.

He makes a similar point further in Mark 10 – James and John ask if they can be #2 and #3 in the Kingdom:

[41](#)And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.[42](#)And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.[43](#)But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, [44](#)and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.[45](#)For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

There's a difference between the Christian and the non-Christian approach to life. The manager in the parable was using what he had access to in order to take care of himself and his master applauded his creativity. But in order to please our Master, Christians should do the opposite, we should use all that we have been given oversight of to serve God and bless others. He'll explain more in verse 9:

[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.

[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?[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.”

1. You are either going to love people and use money or you will use people and love money. Money is just a tool to use in the pursuit of the ultimate purpose of your life whether that is to serve yourself or to love God and serve others. *Money just gives you the ability to do what is already in your heart.*
  - a. The way in which you spend your money is a reflection of your life. You spend your life to earn money and then you spend your money as a reflection of your life. As a result, your checkbook or your credit or debit card statement show what you think is important and what you worship. They reveal what you are spending your life on.
  - b. Here's another way to tell what you are truly serving, (Guzik) consider this principle: *you will sacrifice for your God*. If you will sacrifice for the sake of money, but will not sacrifice for the sake of Jesus, don't deceive yourself: money is your God.

- c. And Jesus says you can only serve one master. So, you either use your money to serve God or you serve money and use God. What is your life really about – what is the testimony of your bank statement?
2. We should be using the life and resources that have been entrusted to us to glorify God and serve others. We should be using this “unrighteous wealth” to further the kingdom of God, and if we do so, we will inherit a much greater spiritual and “true wealth;” a reward in heaven where, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, thieves do not break in and steal and moths and rust do not destroy.
3. The amount involved doesn’t affect the outcome, the condition of the heart does. At the core of it all He says, is character – if you are faithful with little, you will be faithful with much, but if you are dishonest in little you will also be dishonest with much.
  - a. Sometimes people say ‘oh I’d like to tithe, or I’d like to give more, but not until I’ve gotten some of these other bills paid down, or not until we’ve established a bit of savings, or whatever.’ There’s a desire in their heart to do the right thing, but their hearts are divided and they’re leaning more toward putting God on hold while they serve money a little longer.
  - b. But, if you can’t be faithful to serve and honor the Lord with the little amount you have now, what is going to change that will make you so willing or able to do it when you get more? You’ve just got to do it and make sacrifices in other areas of your life so you can honor God and bless others.
  - c. Now notice, I’m not saying ANYTHING about specific amounts or percentages – that’s between you and the Lord, what’s important is the attitude, not the amount.
  - d. I’ll share with you how this worked out in my own life:
    - i. Wanted to get on top of things financially when single – a few thousand in debt. Tithe or pay off debt? God: do both and I’ll take care of you.
    - ii. Paid everything off and started saving for a ring and honeymoon – knew I wanted to get married one day and didn’t want to bring those expenses into our new relationship. I actually rolled coins to pay for her engagement ring, something small. Now, yrs later she has BLING.
    - iii. Eventually met Mady – she was under the same convictions, and when we got married we started off with only a vehicle payment as debt.
    - iv. Six or seven degrees between the two of us – no loans. GI Bill, Mady received a couple of smaller, but significant inheritances which we used to pay off the cars and start saving for the future.

- v. We tithe off everything that God brings into our lives – off Christmas gifts, off inheritances, and off my per diem and travel claims.
- vi. So, one day it came time to sell our house in California, in the summer of 2005, at the peak of real estate market – our house had gone up quite a bit in value and when we sold it, it seemed to us that the Lord had ‘given’ us all this money and it was only right to tithe off of it. So we wrote a substantial check to our church on our way out the door – so significant in fact we got audited by the IRS on our taxes.
- vii. Today we have no debt. I’m not saying it always works this way, but I see God behind it all in our lives.

Once again, the bottom line of it all is, how you spend your money reflects what you think of God. Are you using it to honor Him, spread the gospel, and bless others – are you seeking an eternal reward, or are you gathering it all up to spend on yourself and your desires because you think you need to take care of your own future?

Well, now we’ll see the response of the Pharisees who rejected what Jesus was saying because they were consumed with themselves.

[14](#)The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.

[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.

[16](#)“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. [17](#)But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

[18](#)“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Now, that seems like a strange jump, right? Why are we talking about divorce and adultery all of the sudden? Because the connecting thread moving through these two chapters is a focus on self at the expense of others. The Pharisees and scribes were upset that tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus – they weren’t focused on the needs of others, they just cared about themselves.

So Jesus has been using all these illustrations trying to get the point across that God loves the lost, and that people who love Him should be focused on others who are in need - not just on themselves.

Under a cloak of religious righteousness this church crowd has been going along and doing whatever they want finding ways to excuse their behavior and write it off as a commitment to holiness. They had even come up with their own explanations for why it was OK to violate God’s commands regarding marriage and go ahead with divorce.

We'll come back and take a better look at it next week, we'll examine all the reasons they had concocted, but for now you just need to see that Jesus is pointing out the ungodly selfishness behind it all. And He tells them that no matter how clever you think your excuses are, God's Law has not changed, He still hates divorce no matter how convenient you find it.

It's frightening to consider how many explanations we can come up with for our sin. But when we are living to take care of ourselves and pamper and please ourselves, we'll take extraordinary measures to get a little further ahead. We'll lie, cheat, steal, we'll walk out on vows we have made.

And Jesus wants us to know that He is not like that, and we shouldn't be either. That's why this is all so important – we need to know what Jesus is like and then show that to others.

We should value and welcome the lost,  
we should welcome in the younger brother who is tired of living for himself,  
we should use our money to honor God and serve others because He takes care of us.  
We should keep our marriage vows because God promises never to walk out on us.

Our lives should be changed because of what we have experienced in Him and it should affect the way we live with others.

We'll come back to this next week and continue looking at this scene while Jesus keeps developing his point but let's stop here and ask God

to expose any selfish hypocrisy in our lives.

Let's ask Him to show us any areas in which we are not accurately reflecting His heart,

and let's ask Him to show us how He wants us to use our unrighteous wealth to build His heavenly kingdom.

1. The manager used his access to opportunity to create an advantage for himself for the future. Christians should do the same thing, but our definition of the future is different because of the awareness of God in our lives. The manager was just looking out for his immediate term future and paid no attention to existence of a God who would hold him accountable one day.
2. As Christians we are VERY aware of God's existence, and because He exists we do things differently. Jesus says we should use unrighteous wealth, money, not to manipulate our circumstances and hedge our position, but in a way that will earn us eternal wealth and rewards in Heaven.