

Introduction:

1. What would you think if Jesus told a story about an employee who was completely irresponsible on his job and mishandled his employer's money?
 - a. The situation was so bad that Jesus said the man was fired from his job. On the way out, this fellow cheated his employer by falsifying the books to his own advantage.
 - b. Not only that, but Jesus commends this man for his sinful dishonesty and says Christians could learn from him. What would you think of that? Would you think there was something inconsistent in that story with the character and moral integrity of Jesus? I hope you would.
2. What I have just given you is not an accurate representation of the Lord's teaching. It is, however, what some people assume that the Lord taught in Luke 16:1-9. Read the parable.
 - a. It is called "the problem parable." Many view it as the most difficult of all the Lord's teaching. Some think He commends an act of deliberate dishonesty as a pattern for disciples to copy.
 - b. This unjust steward, facing dismissal, unwilling to work with his hands or beg, reduced the debts of his master's creditors, so they would show gratitude by caring for him after his firing.
 - c. Let us dismiss the faulty idea that Jesus approved the dishonesty of this steward. We need only to point to the fact that Jesus called him "unjust" (verse 8). Furthermore, Jesus did not commend this man. In the story, it is the master of the steward who commended him—not for his dishonesty—but for the fact that he was shrewd in taking care of his own future.
3. Why does Jesus give this unusual teaching? What is His point? What does it mean to us? Most folks get so caught up in the difficulty of the parable that they never grasp its teaching. But once it is properly understood, it is one of the most dramatic teachings in the gospel. What does it teach?

The Lesson:**I. A look at the steward and his master.**

- A. Though neither man is named, the roles of such men were well understood in Bible times.
 1. The master was a man of great wealth. The very fact that he had a steward who managed his affairs signified that he was a man of status and position. Jesus called him rich.
 2. The office of a steward was one of considerable authority. He was often the sole manager of all that the master had. He held a position of business administrator. He could buy, sell, negotiate and do all the things that were necessary to manage the affairs of the master. A classic example of such a man is seen in the case of Joseph, Genesis 39:1-6.
- B. The steward in our parable abused his position.
 1. It is said that he "wasted" his master's goods (verse 1). Evidently the evidence of this was so great that there was no need for discussion. He was to be dismissed.
 2. Before his firing, however, he was to give account of his stewardship. He was to present the books to his master (verse 2). He makes no defense for himself. He was guilty.
 3. Guilty, but smart in the ways of this world!
 - a. He was either too weak or too proud to work with a shovel to make a living (verse 3).
 - b. He was too ashamed to beg. Too ashamed to beg, but not too ashamed to steal!
 - c. And so, he further defrauded his master by discounting the bills of those who owed his master (verses 4-7). These were large sums of money.
 - d. His motive was simple: Self-preservation. He saved these men a fortune so they would take care of him after his firing. He provided for himself. He was smart and shrewd. According to the "anything goes" philosophy of this world, he had secured his future.
 4. It was for his shrewdness that the master (*not our Master*) commended this man.
 - a. While the master might have been angry at the steward's further fraudulent act (and maybe he was), he nonetheless sees that the man has made a smart move!
 - b. The man was unjust, a crook, but smart enough to take care of himself. And, while he appears smart, his conduct will be brought before God on the last day. This man is a covetous thief and will be judged by God for his sin, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.
 5. There is nothing in this parable that justifies this man's actions before God.
 - a. Remember again that Jesus called him "unjust" (verse 8). It was an injustice to his master to waste his master's goods and then cook the books for his own benefit.

- b. But his master commended his shrewdness; the steward knew how to look after his own affairs. Only that is meant, and nothing more. There is no justification of his actions, not by his master and not by our Master.
- C. But what does this strange story have to do with anything? What does it mean to us?

II. The Lord's application of the parable.

- A. A parable always has an application; otherwise it would not be a parable. The application begins in the latter half of Luke 16:8.
 - 1. In this verse Jesus makes a powerful indictment that describes many of God's people. Jesus teaches us that men of the world, wicked though they may be, are often wiser than those who follow God.
 - 2. Jesus teaches us that the children of light (Christians) ought to show as much forethought, planning and ingenuity as the children of this world. The sons of this world know how to take care of themselves in this world; the sons of the next world don't know how to prepare themselves for the world to come! A powerful statement!
- B. Jesus makes further application of the parable in Luke 16:9.
 - 1. By the phrase "unrighteous mammon," Jesus is simply referring to money. This phrase is put in contrast to "true riches" (verse 11).
 - a. He is not speaking of money that is gained in a sinful way, but of the way that most people use their money. They trust in the deceitfulness of riches. That, in fact, is what the Pharisees did. And they powerfully objected to Jesus' teaching, Luke 16:14.
 - b. Like the Pharisees, most people use their money unrighteously, treating it as their own, when they are only stewards of that money.
 - 2. Jesus teaches that our money should be used to prepare us for eternity.
 - a. This is no different than Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 6:17-19.
 - b. It is what Jesus taught in Matthew 6:19-21.
 - 3. But who are the "friends" of Luke 16:9 and how are they to receive us into an everlasting home? And what does Jesus mean when He says, "...when you fail"?
 - a. Some translations say "when it fails," referring to money. In either case, it is talking about death, when earthly riches will no longer help us. Jesus says we need to use our money (and all resources) while we are in *this* world so as to help us in the *next*.
 - b. The "friends" is understood to be those needy saints that we have helped with our money (and other resources). How is that done? By the means in Matthew 25:34-40.
- C. Ultimately, this parable is about using wisdom in that over which we are stewards. It is about using what we have to prepare us for the world to come. While money is the issue at hand, it is about all of our stewardship. Don't be outdone by the sons of this world!
 - 1. Do we make proper use of our time? Should there not be time for dedicated and consistent worship, time for visiting the sick and needy, time for Bible study and prayer?
 - 2. Do we make proper use of our physical resources? Our homes, cars and other possessions, should we not employ them in God's service through help and hospitality?
 - 3. Do we make proper use of our abilities—singing, teaching, inviting, encouraging?
 - 4. But the immediate application is about money, Luke 16:10-14. While it may *make us feel good* to help poor saints, spread the gospel and edify brethren through the use of our funds, this is not the Lord's point. Helping someone today may give us passing satisfaction; but the Lord's point is that helping someone today gives us eternal satisfaction. It is to enjoy a treasure in heaven that surpasses any gratification here.
- D. The crooked, unjust steward knew something about taking care of himself in this world. What a shame that so many of God's people don't know how to prepare for the world to come!

Conclusion:

- 1. A difficult parable? It is challenging to say the least. But the real challenge isn't in understanding, but in learning the lesson and applying it. What a shame that any of God's people would miss heaven because they failed to use the money put in their hands for unselfish purposes!
- 2. Someone, somewhere, may scoff at Jesus' teaching. So did the Pharisees, Luke 16:14.
- 3. Three take homes: (1) Jesus does not commend dishonesty. (2) Jesus demands right use of money—it's OK to enjoy wealth, but send some ahead. (3) Jesus orders us to prepare for eternity.
- 4. Are we as wise as the sons of this world? He is challenging us and our will.