

## Turning Points: It's Really About the Money - Luke 16:1-13

### Parable of the Shrewd Manager (New Living)

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. 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 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. Ah, I know how to ensure that I'll have plenty of friends who will give me a home when I am fired.'

"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?' 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.'

"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.'

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

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

"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 God and be enslaved to money."

-----

So, the about to be fired manager - invites each person who owed money to his employer to come and discuss the situation. He asked the first one, 'How much do you owe?' The man replied, 'I owe him eight thousand dollars.' So the manager told him, 'tear up that bill and write another one for six thousand dollars.

"And how much do you owe my employer?' he asked the next man. 'A thousand dollars,' was the reply. 'Here,' the manager said, 'take your bill and replace it with one for only eight hundred.'

The owner listened in on the conversations because the office was bugged. So the owner visited the manager and told him how proud he was to have such a shrewd person handling his affairs. He promoted the manager to Vice President, gave him a raise and a new Mercedes.

What do you do with a story like this? Where is the message? It's not that the people in the story aren't real. They may be too real. They could be in any retail sales business, or your lawyer, or your accountant. The question is: What is someone like this doing in the Bible?

This is one of the most difficult and controversial parables that Jesus tells. I looked at quite a few commentaries so I could find out what the scholars had to say. Frankly, not much. Some of them just skipped the story and talked about the sayings in the end but I believe you have to first understand this story to appreciate the lessons that follow.

In chapter 15, the chapter before this one Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and the crowd about God searching for the lost. You have the story of the lost sheep: when one strays, the shepherd leaves the 99 to find that one. The lost coin, how diligently the widow looks for that one coin because it's part of a matched set. Finally the lost son, or the prodigal son.

But then Jesus is away from the Pharisees and the crowd and he's now just talking to the disciples. This is for the people who have made the commitment to follow Jesus and they are now asking that huge question that comes next: I choose to follow Jesus: Now What?

### **I choose to follow Jesus: Now What?**

I am supposed to be different, act different but what does that mean? Do I tell everyone at work that I am now a Christian and therefore a much better human being so treat me accordingly? We have changed but how do we act changed?

So, Jesus tells us a story about a dishonest manager who shrewdly saves his job and impresses his boss. What?

Here is the lesson: The story is not really about the dishonest manager... it's about the money.

**The secret to understanding this parable is to understand that it is not about people... It's about the money! How you use it. How you spend it. How you manage it.**

That is also the potential turning point for all of us. Because when it comes to becoming a Christian, there are very real and down-to-earth challenges that face us and one of the most important ones is, "How do we handle our resources?" Jesus is actually very practical and he knows that money is an important part of living so all of chapter 16 is about money, Pharisees and money, Lazarus and the rich man. Jesus teaches: put your money where your faith is.

The dishonest manager was paid to handle the owner's money. In those days, you collected a certain amount for the owner but anything else you could collect you kept for yourself. That was your pay. Sort of a commission plan. The rumor is that this particular manager was getting greedy and trying to collect too much and the owner found out about it and fired him. Most scholars feel that what the manager did after being threatened with losing his job was call in people who owed money and eliminated his commission. He lost the profit but he kept his job. The owner was grateful because he got his money. The manager was grateful because he kept his job. The debtors were grateful because they got a better deal. Shrewd. Very shrewd.

A wise use of money to accomplish a greater purpose. Listen to what Jesus says:

It is true that the citizens of this world are more shrewd than the godly are. I tell you, use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. In this way, your generosity stores up a reward for you in heaven.

**Jesus wants us learn: Use worldly wealth to gain friends so that when it is gone you will be welcomed into heaven.**

I hear this statement occasionally: "The only way to be a good Christian is to sell all that we have and go live in a cave and memorize scripture for the rest of our lives." Not True! Or I hear this statement: "Don't handle money or it will corrupt you." Jesus isn't saying that at all. Jesus is saying use your money and your resources wisely, for my greater good.

Jesus gives four clear lessons following the story:

1. **We need to be more shrewd in how we handle our resources.** Money is not something to avoid. Money is something to be used for the glory of God.
2. **Money can be used to cement friendships.** The Jews have a saying: "Charity given to the poor will stand as credit in the future world to come." Our true wealth is measured not in what we have. It's measured in how we give it away.
3. **"Unless you are faithful in small matters, you won't be faithful in large ones."** V10 My children used to say, give me a bigger allowance and I'll do my chores. I say, do your chores and I'll think about giving you a bigger allowance. Adults say, "I know I've lied a lot in the past but if you trust me now, I'll stop lying."
4. **No one can serve two masters.** For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." In other words, money doesn't have to corrupt but it often does. If you are not careful, you will find yourself serving the wrong master.

I read a story in the news about a contractor who was working on a ATM in Corpus Christi, Texas. This worker somehow accidentally locked himself in a small room connected to the machine, while changing a lock.

He wasn't carrying his keycard or phone so he was unable to contact anyone. Unsure how to escape his trap, the resourceful captive began putting handwritten notes in the machine's receipt slot. Each note contained a similar message. "Please help, I'm stuck in here and I don't have my phone. Please call my boss at 210-\*\*\*-\*\*\*\*."

Some customers thought the scribbled notes were a prank. The unfortunate prisoner remained in the machine for nearly two hours before he was rescued when a customer finally called the police. They showed up to investigate and could hear the man calling for help from inside the machine. When the contractor finally convinced the police he was stuck in the machine they broke down the door and rescued him.

You might think it would be wonderful to be trapped in a room full of cash. The traumatized contractor wouldn't agree. He is one of the few people on the planet who has ever been trapped in an ATM. He learned first-hand that money doesn't make a person happy.

**(Pause) I have a confession to make.** I don't want to sound like somehow, I can preach this message without deeply feeling the consequences or that somehow, I have my act together. This is a never-ending challenge for all of us.

I have been in debt so deep I was living from paycheck to paycheck making payments. It was not a fun way to live and it really hindered any kind of giving or helping others. I worked long hours because I had to not because I wanted to. I was not fulfilled and most of the time, I was so stressed out that I couldn't enjoy the good things I was working so hard to possess.

But even this week, as I was writing this message on handling money, I found a little computer I wanted to buy. It offered features I really liked and it was on sale. I was ready to commit when the reality of what I was doing finally hit home. I am getting ready to stand up in front of 500 people and tell them about handling money wisely and I'm getting ready to make a very unnecessary purchase because believe me, I have plenty in the way of computers.

Within minutes of coming to my senses, I received a phone call from someone who needs financial help. Her mother has cancer and they are struggling to pay the bills. An hour after that, I was offered the opportunity to help our church in a significant way but there was some cost.

If I had purchased that computer, I would have still found a way but not purchasing it made my other decisions so much easier.

I can't promise anything next week however.

If you want to test this, just take a look in your checkbook or at your Visa statement. What percentage of your money could be said is being used wisely in a way God would approve? This is practical and blunt Christianity. Be wise and there will be eternal rewards.

1. How can we be shrewder in dealing with our resources?
2. How can we use our resources to cement better friendships?
3. "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with very much..."
4. How can we use money to serve God rather than allow money to control us?

I've talked to more than one wealthy person who at the end of life realized one of life's harshest realities, you can't take any of it with you. We're born with nothing, and we take nothing with us when we die. Living primarily for what we can accumulate makes for an amazing estate sale but it's not what ultimately counts. Money cannot buy happiness. Work hard and enjoy your success, but don't fall for the lie that happiness comes from being surrounded by money for one simple reason; it doesn't.

**This applies to churches as well. Money and resources are to be used shrewdly.**

Years ago, I visited a church in Martinsville, Virginia and met a truly unique pastor. He's also a shrewd money manager who used his talents to buy almost a city block of unused business property and develop it for the church. With a typical building, he would develop it and open up a business with half the property and a ministry with the other half. In one building he had restaurant on one side and clothing and food pantry on the other. In a large warehouse he had storage facilities on one side and a large youth indoor playground on the other.

Shrewd. Very Shrewd.

The parable doesn't say what happened to the "Dishonest Manager" after getting his job back. So technically we don't know whether this was a "Turning Point" for him or not. But I like to think that this was a life-long lesson for him. I like to think that he did learn and he did change.

I certainly did. In many ways, I was once the "Dishonest Manager" in my dealings with others. I set my work goals, my achievement goals high but my standard for achieving those goals was not always so high. I knew how to cut a few corners, stretch a story. It may not have been illegal but it wasn't right and deep down, I knew that I should and could do better.

When I made that commitment to follow Jesus, I knew deep down that my attitude needed to change. It was hard at first. I had my share of bad habits so I needed a lot of effort, prayer and persistence to make changes.

**But I did change. I did adjust. It was a turning point for me. It can be for you too.**

What is interesting is that I don't remember losing any sales because of my change. In fact if anything, our sales increased. What seemed hard, maybe impossible at first became easier. What I thought would be a liability for me became an asset. My handicap became a strength.

**We don't mean to do it but we show the world how we serve God, more by our spending habits than by our worship attendance.**

**We are viewed by the way we act on the job, not by the number of Bible studies we attend.**

Being an active Christian is a day to day process that involves everything we do and say. It involves how we spend our time and our money. It involves real commitment and it definitely isn't

easy. Actually, church attendance and Bible studies, devotional and prayer time are important because they are God's way to strengthen us and helps us.

Let us Pray

Communion preparation

In a way, God is coming to us in much the same way as the owner pictured in the story. He has checked our book and found that we have come up short. There is however one huge difference.

God loved us enough to send Jesus to live that perfect life that sets an example for us.  
God loved us enough to send Jesus to teach us how to live through parables such as this one.  
God loved us enough to send Jesus to die for us as the perfect sacrifice for our sinful ways.  
God loved us enough to send Jesus to be resurrected from the grave to show us eternal life.  
God loved us enough to provide the Holy Spirit to continue guiding our daily lives.

Whether you have a little or a lot...

Whether you are a new Christian or a life-long follower...

God put you on this earth for a reason...

You are here to find that reason and receive the help you need to carry it out...

Your resources and how you use them is a part of that reason you are here...

Our church resources and how we use them is a part of the reason we are here...