

God's Shrewd Money Managers

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 February 2015

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] Well, take your Bibles that you brought with you from your homes.

You've got it with you, don't you? Your Bible. I don't know if we have any in the pews anymore or not. If you've got one up there, you can grab that. And I guess if you've just got it on your phone, then look at it there.

Sorry for the old fogu-ish coming out of me. Anyway, whatever form that you have the Scriptures, turn to Luke 16.

Luke 16, and I'm going to be reading verses 1 through 13 here in just a moment. Our text, of course, consists of another one of Jesus' many parables.

Jesus told a lot of parables. We know that, don't we? And recorded for us in the Gospels, I think, upwards to about 40 parables, as a matter of fact. And this one is usually entitled, The Parable of the Unjust Steward.

[1 : 09] At least that's how the King James kind of captions it or entitles it. Some versions would have Parable of the Dishonest Manager, and that's interpretive. And I think it's probably correct.

In fact, I'm going to refer to him as a manager, I guess, more than a steward. That's a term that we understand, we can identify with. And I would also say that this, again, is one of those parables that was created by Jesus.

I mean, this is a fictitious story. I mean, Jesus created these parables. They're not real life. I mean, you know, the real to life, but not real life. And Jesus created this parable, designed it to be provocative.

And Jesus quite often did that, didn't he? And so it was meant, then, to startle, even shock, at least one group of people present at the telling of it.

And I'll explain that a little bit more after we read it. So let's go ahead and read the passage, Luke chapter 16, starting with verse 1, verses 1 through 13.

[2 : 18] He also said to his disciples, There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods.

So he called him and said to him, What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.

Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig. I am ashamed to beg.

I have resolved what to do. That when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, How much do you owe my master?

And he said, A hundred measures of oil. So he said to him, Take your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then he said to another, And how much do you owe?

[3 : 23] So he said, A hundred measures of wheat. And he said to him, Take your bill and write eighty. So the master commended the unjust steward, because he had dealt shrewdly.

For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much. And he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.

Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.

[4 : 29] You cannot serve God and mammon. All right? So there's the parable. And, of course, also Jesus' application of the parable. And that's what we're going to be focusing on here this morning.

Now, as far as we can tell from what Luke has written here in this passage, the setting, the location, the occasion, however you want to put it, is the same as it was back in chapter 15.

And if you've been here over the last several weeks, then you know what took place in chapter 15. Remember, in chapter 15, Jesus was addressing essentially or primarily the Pharisees and the scribes.

They were, remember, criticizing Jesus or murmuring against Jesus because he, quote, was receiving sinners and was eating with them.

And so in response, remember, Jesus tells three parables. This is all back there in chapter 15. And these three parables conveyed essentially the same main point.

[5 : 32] And we took a couple of weeks discussing that. And I also mentioned to you that the three parables Jesus told in chapter 15 were directed primarily essentially to the same audience, the Pharisees and the scribes.

But now when we get here to verse 1 of chapter 16, though the setting is the same, the location is the same, the audience, there's a shift kind of in the audience, and yet maybe not so much.

And we'll get to that here in just a minute. But verse 1 of chapter 16 does say that he, Jesus, also, that's how we know this is tied to the same setting in chapter 15, he also said to his disciples.

All right, so they were, of course, present, right? Everywhere Jesus went, the disciples were there. And they were present back there in chapter 15 when Jesus was addressing the Pharisees and the scribes.

And now he turns to them, the disciples, and speaks to them. That is, he turns his face to them and speaks directly to them. But we need to understand that the Pharisees and the scribes are still present.

[6 : 42] They're still there. And they're listening. They're listening in to what Jesus has to say to his disciples because the Pharisees were always there and they were always eavesdropping.

Even when Jesus was speaking personally to his disciples, the Pharisees were there and they were listening to what Jesus had to say to his disciples. And I would go a step further and say, suggest to you, that Jesus meant for the Pharisees to hear this.

He meant for them. In fact, it could be that they were his intended audience, not just them, because he certainly has some things that are very important for his disciples to learn.

And we're going to learn those things here this morning. But on the kind of the outside of it or the main intention of it, this parable was told with the Pharisees in mind and it was applied to them as well as to the disciples.

Jesus had the Pharisees in mind. In fact, we know that from verse 14. I didn't go quite that far. But you can look back in your Bibles and look at verse 14. And there it says, Now the Pharisees who were lovers of money.

[7 : 58] Now this parable is all about that subject as we shall see. The Pharisees were lovers of money. They also heard all these things. So they heard the parable. And they heard the application of it.

Though their reaction was pretty profound, they derided him, it says here in verse 14. They ridiculed him because of the parable and the application of the parable.

So you see, Jesus wanted them to hear the parable and especially his application of the parable. And that's why he created this story to be so kind of strange and shocking in many ways.

The story is strange and it is also shocking. So let's first look at the parable. Let's just kind of walk through the parable. And so first of all this morning, if you like to write down outlines, the parable told.

That's number one. The parable told. So let's just kind of walk through it here. Verse 1, There was a certain rich man.

[9 : 02] That's how it begins. That's how Jesus starts the parable. And this is just, you know, obviously a wealthy man, a wealthy landowner, a businessman. And he no doubt had many, many holdings, land, real estate, businesses, debtors as well, and the like, who, the parable goes on to say, had a steward.

So this rich man had a steward. Some versions use the word manager. He had a manager. And so he was so wealthy then that he required someone to be his manager of his many holdings, of his wealth.

He would oversee his business affairs, so to speak, and collect his debts, as becomes clear in the parable. But there was something wrong.

There was a problem, wasn't there? Because the parable goes on to say that an accusation was brought to him, brought to the rich man, that this man, this manager, was wasting his goods. Some versions, I believe, have squandering his possessions, and that's the idea. Now that's bad, isn't it? You don't want to have a manager working for you like that. And so his hired business manager was really more than just mishandling his assets.

[10:28] He was dishonest. He was an embezzler. Okay? And so what did the wealthy man do? Well, he did the natural thing, verse 2. So he called him.

Literally called him in. I mean, he didn't call him up on the phone, obviously. Called him in. Called him into his office. And he said to him, What is this I hear about you?

The report that's come back to me about you. I think we're to assume that the parable suggests that the rich man lived somewhere else other than where all of his holdings were.

And so word got back to him about his manager's affairs and how he was dealing with the rich man's possessions.

All right? So he called him in. I've heard this about you. And then he does something that is really very strange. In fact, something that really makes no sense whatsoever.

[11:26] He says to his manager, Give an account of your stewardship for you can no longer be steward. All right?

So he pulls a Donald Trump on him and says, You're fired. But this is the strange part, the shocking part. He says, Before you go, I want you to audit the books.

Really? I mean, this manager has had his hand in the cookie jar and now he's going to be trusted to count how many cookies are left in him. That doesn't make any sense. Any good, wise manager would have called for an outside audit.

He'd come in and check things out, but that's not what he did. And this is really quite shocking. In fact, maybe this should be called the parable of the stupid rich man instead of the dishonest steward.

But now, the point is, the manager, the steward, he's not stupid. Far from it. Verse 3, look at it. Then the steward, the manager, said within himself.

[12:26] So he starts thinking. Starts hatching a plan here. What shall I do? He says. For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. That means he's firing me.

All right, so he's thinking. I will be unemployed. What am I going to do about that? No one's going to hire me for a position of this level anymore.

Certainly no one's going to hire me to manage their affairs. No one is going to hire a manager who's been fired because of embezzlement. And so what am I going to do? All that's left to me would be menial jobs like digging dishes.

And I'm too proud to beg. I mean, I've had a pretty high status here within society. Really, he did. And so I'm too proud to beg. So what shall I do?

And then in verse 4, he has one of those aha moments. And verse 4 says, I have resolved what to do. I know what I shall do.

[13:25] That when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. Now, who would they be? Well, his master's debtors.

His master's debtors. And so verse 5, So he called every one of his master's debtors to him. All right, so clearly this manager was the debt collector for this wealthy man.

And so, one by one, he brings them into his office. There may have been dozens of them, maybe perhaps even hundreds of them.

We don't know. Now, Jesus only mentions two in the parable. But the idea is that there are many debtors. And in the parable, we're only told about two of them. And so the manager, it says here, said to the first, How much do you owe my master?

And he said, A hundred measures of oil. And that would probably be olive oil, which was used for a number of things, not just to cook with, but also they would burn it in their lamps and so forth.

[14 : 34] Very valuable commodity of the day. And so he owed a hundred measures of oil. Debt, you see, in those days were primarily paid not with money, coins or gold or silver, but with commodities.

And, you know, commodities were the currency of the day. And a measure, mentioned here in the Bible, is the Greek word batas, batas. And it is a liquid measurement and it equals eight to nine gallons in our measurement.

Eight to nine gallons. So you can just do the math. He owed, this guy owed the rich man 800 to 900 gallons of olive oil. That's a lot, isn't it? All right, so we're to understand this is pretty big debt.

And so what does the manager do? He says, Let's renegotiate the deal, the debt. And so he says, Take your bill, your debt, and sit down quickly and write 50.

That's 50% discount here. New deal, renegotiate the 50% of what he owed, what he really owed the master. He cuts it in half.

[15 : 48] And really, by the way, we're to understand that he's actually cheating his master out of half of what is rightfully owed him. He's embezzling his master. This is dishonest.

But, of course, the debtor thinks that the manager is still working for the rich man.

That is, he has the authority to do this, and so he's none the wiser, but he's a whole lot happier. You know, and he's quite pleased with his arrangement. The manager has done him a huge favor for which, by the way, he will, the manager will expect something in return.

And that's kind of the point of the parable. We'll get to that in a minute. Verse 7, Then he said to another, And how much do you owe? So he said, A hundred measures of wheat. The word measure, the same word in the English, but it's a different word in the Greek, is kapos, kapos, and it's a dry measurement.

And it equals ten to eleven bushels. All right, so his debt is as much as eleven hundred bushels of wheat. Still, quite large, quite a large debt. And the dishonest manager then says, I tell you what am I going to do?

[17 : 02] Sit down, take your bill, and write eighty. And so he gives him a twenty percent discount. No, no, don't try to force anything into the parable.

You know, difference between fifty percent and twenty percent and come up with some kind of spiritualization of that. It's just simply part of the parable. It doesn't really make any difference. The point is that he cut the bill down.

He robbed from his master twenty percent of what the debt, what the man owed his master.

Deprived him of it. All right, now why did the manager do this? This is the real question. Well, he told us. Told us back there in verse four, didn't he? He said, I have resolved what to do that when I am fired, they, my master's debtors, may receive or welcome me into their houses.

That is, he's saying, they will take care of me. The master's firing me, I'm not going to have a job, and these people I've helped out, they're going to take care of me. Now, why would he think they would do that?

[18 : 09] Because of the culture of the day. It was a strong aspect of the culture and customs of the people of that day. If someone did something for you, then you were duty-bound to do something in return for them, and what you do in return for them had to be of equal or greater value, or else you would be utterly shamed in the community, and no one would ever risk that.

Honor was an extremely important thing to the people of this day. It ought to be the same for us today, and it's not really, but for this day, honor was what it was all about, and he was not about to be shamed in his community, so anything that you would receive, you would give back in return.

Now, imagine that Jesus glanced over the Pharisees when he said this part of the story, because, you know, like this fictitious manager in the parable, the Pharisees took advantage of this custom for their own personal gain.

They did it all the time, and we know that from that parable that Jesus told back in chapter 14. We looked at that a number of weeks, maybe months ago, and where he said to the Pharisees, remember, he says, when you throw a great banquet, do not ask your rich friends, your rich neighbors to come, don't invite them to the banquet, lest they will invite you back and you be repaid. You see, that was their whole motivation, they would invite rich people to this big banquet, and they would even spend a lot of money to do it, because they knew that each one of those rich guests would in turn invite him to their banquet, and so it was, you know, it was for personal gain.

[19 : 58] And Jesus knew that, and I think he kind of put a glance over at the Pharisees when he told this part of the story. But the point is, this manager is so shrewd.

Really, I mean, it's a stroke of genius. He is making some very valuable friends here in the parable by doing what he did. Friends who will not be allowed to forget what this manager did for them. Do you see? And so we, you know, at this point we're sort of shaking our heads in in disgust how dishonest this manager is as we read along in the story.

This is embezzlement. This is dishonest. And then as we read on, we're thrown for a loop because in verse 8 it says, So the master did what?

He praised, he commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. Really? They were not prepared for that part of the story.

[21 : 09] This just doesn't make any sense. And Jesus is telling the story. He created the story. And then all sorts of implications come to mind about Jesus and him telling the story and what that might mean and, you know, the dishonest steward and all that.

And then we have the owner commending him. For doing what he did. How do we make sense out of that? Well, in the first place, what did the master praise him for?

Did he praise him for his dishonesty? No. He's not praising him for his dishonesty. Did he praise him or commend him for cheating him out of a good bit of his wealth?

No. That's not what's going on here. He praised him for his creativity. Really? His ingenuity. His shrewdness.

The master is saying, well, you know, he may be dishonest, but you have to admit he's a pretty smart guy to do this. That's what is going on here.

[22 : 16] All right. So that's the parable told. Then Jesus makes a point. The next line in the verse, the end of the parable, is not part of the parable. It's not what the rich man is saying.

It's what Jesus is saying. And he's making a point. So first we have the parable told. Second, we have the point made. The point made, and it's really simple. Verse 8, for the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

More shrewd about what? About their money. About wealth. About earthly resources. About earthly and worldly assets.

They're more shrewd when it comes to handling these things. And so here is what Jesus is saying to us. He's saying that if the sons of this world, that would be non-Christians, are worldly wise with their wealth, then how much more should the sons of light, that would be Christians, be eternally wise with their wealth?

That's the point Jesus is making. May I say that again? If the sons of this world, the unsaved, non-Christians, are worldly wise with their assets, their wealth, then how much more, even much more, should the sons of light, Christians, be eternally wise with their wealth?

[23 : 49] He's not saying that we should be dishonest in how we handle our wealth. He's not saying that at all. He's not commending the steward for that. He's not commending this whole idea of being dishonest, being shrewd in a dishonest way.

That's not the point. This man's dishonesty has nothing whatsoever to do with the point of the parable. The master, remember, did not commend his manager for his dishonesty.

He commended him for his shrewdness in using worldly wealth to secure his future. That's what he is commending him for. And Jesus is saying, basically, pagans are better at that than most Christians.

That's the idea. All right, so at this point you might be thinking, well, then this is a lesson on wise money management. You know, that's what you're thinking. This is a lesson on making good financial investments and plans for your retirement, for your future.

This is a financial peace seminar. You know, how to get out of debt and how to build wealth. No, it's not. In fact, Jesus is taking us way beyond all of that.

[25 : 03] That's what we need to see. The wealth that we may accumulate in this world, no matter how wise we are with it, that wealth we may accumulate in this world stays here.

Right? It stays here. In fact, I was reading about funeral homes who provide suits for the deceased when the family requests it. You know, maybe the deceased doesn't have a suit and they want to be buried.

The family wants the deceased to be buried in a suit and they don't have a suit. And so the funeral home will provide that for them at a cost, of course. And I was reading, these are specially made

suits for this very purpose.

They are made with no pockets. Now, they have what appear to be pockets. But they're not real. And it's more cost effective for the funeral home to, you know, kind of make these suits without pockets.

And, besides that, dead people don't need pockets. Right? Because you can't take it with you.

[26 : 15] But Jesus' point is, again, simply this. If pagans... Now, listen to this. We've got to get this down because we're going to get to some applications here in a moment.

But here's the point that Jesus is making. If pagans, non-Christians, are shrewd in their use of wealth to bring them temporal rewards, rewards that are just for this life, then Christians should be just as shrewd, even more shrewd, in their use of wealth to bring about eternal rewards.

That's his point. All right, so the parable told. The point made. And then third, the principle applied. The principle applied. And quickly, Jesus gives a four-fold application of his principle concerning money or wealth or possessions.

Four-fold application. And these are really easy to see if you think about them. Here's principle number one or the first application. Use your earthly wealth to build up heavenly wealth.

[27 : 35] Use your earthly wealth, however much you have. Use it to build up heavenly wealth.

Verse 9. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, or it fails, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

You say, Pastor, I thought you said this was easy to see. Well, think about it. First place, understand that the unrighteous mammon, or the wealth of unrighteousness in some versions, is simply a reference to earthly wealth.

That's all it is. He's not talking about the morality or immorality of it, the righteousness or unrighteousness of a certain thing. He's talking about material wealth that belongs to this world. And every one of us have some of it. Some more than others, but we all have some. It's in your bank accounts. In your billfolds.

[28 : 45] In pocketbooks, ladies. It's in your safety deposit box, if you have one of those. Or maybe it's secured and in some safe place, like stocks and bonds with some broker that you have employed.

That's where it is. Or it's sitting in your houses. It's in your closets, hanging in your closets. It's parked in your garages. What are we talking about?

We're talking about all of our assets. And all of us have some. Unrighteous mammon. It's not evil mammon. It's not that money is all evil.

Now, the money is the root of all things. The love of it is the root of all things that are evil. But it's not the money that's evil. And all of us have some of it.

You'd like to have more. I know. I understand that. But... Well, Albert, we could all say amen to that. I'm sure. But we all have some.

[29 : 46] Now, the dishonest... Understand this. Apply this to the parable. The dishonest manager in the parable had authority over great sums of earthly wealth. And he used it shrewdly for his personal benefit, right?

That's what he did. How? He purchased friends with it. He purchased friends with it. So that when it failed, that is, when he no longer had any of it, this earthly wealth, those friends would receive him and take care of him.

All right? That's the parable. And Jesus is using that to say this to us. God's people should be at least as shrewd as the man in the parable with their earthly wealth and the friends they are purchasing, so to speak, we are purchasing, so to speak, are where?

In heaven. They're in heaven. An eternal or everlasting home or eternal dwelling. Those are the friends he's talking about here.

You see, one day, sooner for some, later for others, no one knows what a day will bring forth, but one day your earthly wealth will fail you.

[31 : 11] Because you're going to fail. That is, you're going to die. And you can't take it with you. Right? You can't take it with you. But, now listen to this very carefully, certain things that you might purchase with your earthly wealth, guess what, you can take with you.

You say, really? I'm not talking about that bass boat. Or 60-inch TV. Or whatever it may be. I'm not talking about that. There are certain things you can purchase with your earthly wealth that you can take with you.

Or, more specifically, they can be stored in heaven and be there when you arrive. Jesus said, use your earthly wealth to make friends for yourselves.

Friends who will receive you into an everlasting home. That's clearly a reference to heaven. So these friends are in heaven. And so Jesus is talking about people who will be in heaven because you were shrewd with your earthly wealth here.

Do you understand? That is, you used your earthly wealth here wisely for the work of the gospel that resulted in the salvation of souls.

[32 : 33] Now, your money doesn't save people. I'm not saying that. God saves people. But He does so through the proclamation of the gospel.

And some of that must happen through the sending of people to go and proclaim the gospel. And we could here name a hundred different ways that money is deployed in the spread of the gospel that results in the salvation of souls.

And this is what Jesus is talking about. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6, 19. He said, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

And Revelation 14, verse 13 is also interesting. Blessed is the dead who die in the Lord that they may rest from their labors and their works follow them.

[33 : 48] They follow them, meaning follow them to heaven. Here's the second application. How you use your earthly wealth reveals the maturity level of your faith.

How you use your earthly possessions, your earthly wealth, reveals the maturity level of your faith. Verse 10, He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much.

And he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Have you ever heard anybody say, Well, if God would just let me win the lottery, I would give most of it to the church.

Hmm? Hmm? Everybody say that? Ever thought that yourself? Just think how much I could give to the cause of Christ. If I could just get that, you know, \$10 million sweepstake, then just think of my tithe.

What would that mean? You know, somehow kind of convincing God that maybe He ought to let you have that. But no, you wouldn't. You wouldn't do it. Most of us.

[35 : 01] Because, see, the true indicator of your faithfulness when it comes to money is what you're doing with what you have now. We all know that.

If you are not using what little you have now for the kingdom, then what makes you think you're going to use more of it if God blesses you with more? You won't.

You see, how you use your earthly wealth reveals the maturity level of your faith. And He goes on to say in verse 11, something even connected to this, but even more disturbing, really.

He says, Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, that is your earthly wealth, who will commit to your trust the true riches? The true riches.

Your eternal wealth. See, your eternal reward is at stake here. It really is. If you fail to invest your earthly wealth in the work of the gospel here, then you will impoverish yourself in eternity.

[36 : 12] I know that's disturbing, but that's what Jesus is saying. Eternal reward belongs to those who are faithful here. And here's the third application.

All of your earthly wealth comes from God and belongs to God. Verse 12, And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

Now, in the Greek text, the word man's, another man's, is not really there in the text. Some versions leave that out altogether because it's not in the Greek text.

It literally reads, faithful in what is another's. And we all know, clearly, don't have to speculate, about who this another is.

It's God. Jesus is referring to God. Every single thing, we all know this, so this is not profound, every single thing you have, your physical assets, your paper assets, your tangible assets, intangible assets, your abilities, your talents, your very life itself, all of these things come from God and belong to Him.

[37 : 36] We know that, don't we? It's all His. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He owns the hills. He owns you. He owns everything about you. Everything you have.

It's His. And so what does that mean? That means that we are God's money managers. Just like the guy in the parable. Hopefully not like Him. But like Him in one way at least. In the shrewd, wise way we use it. See, He is the master, the owner, and we are the managers, the stewards.

And when it comes to how we manage our earthly wealth, we are acting for God. See, we have to be reminded of that from time to time.

We're acting for God and God is saying, be faithful with what is mine and one day I will give you what is yours in eternity and for eternity.

[38 : 37] Your eternal inheritance that one day we will have. One more application. God is the most valuable possession you have.

Verse 13. No servant can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.

Alright, so the manager or steward in the parable tried to serve two masters, didn't he? He tried to serve the rich man, his employer, and he tried to serve wealth.

Money. But he couldn't do it. No one can. And so he ended up hating his master and loving his master's wealth.

he ended up despising his master and loving or giving his loyalty to money. It'll happen that way every time.

[39 : 44] Jesus said you cannot serve God and mammon or wealth. You cannot serve them both. And so we then must decide that God is infinitely more valuable to us than wealth, than earthly wealth.

so much more of value to us that the earthly wealth doesn't even really count. It's of no worth in comparison to our God.

That's what we must decide. And here's the application. The Puritans used to say man's problem is that he loves the world and he uses the Lord.

and that's just backward isn't it? We need to love the Lord and use the world the things of this world.

Do you see that? Our earthly possessions our earthly wealth are simply resources that God has given to us and they are given to us for what?

[40 : 55] To use for God's eternal purposes. The thing that we really love the thing that we really cherish the thing that we value above all other things is God.

It's God. It's our Lord. Thank you.