

Having just described the vain living of the prodigal son, one would assume that His next parable Christ would not describe an unscrupulous rascal as an example of Christian living. Turning His attention away from the Pharisees towards the disciples, Jesus explained how it was that a person whose life had been changed by the saving love of God should pursue living out the pleasure of serving his new Father. In this parable we have an apparent difficulty discerning who the hero is. In fact, in this story, there is not a single person mentioned of at least four characters (or groups of characters) that is not corrupt in some way. Also, along the way, we find a few lessons interposed within the story that ought to catch our attention. Unlike this rascally manager, let's commit ourselves to digging, and find Truth to be our treasure today!

Luke 16: *The Parable of the Unjust Steward NKJV*

- 1 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.
- 2 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.'
- 3 "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.
- 4 I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'
- 5 "So he called every one of his master's debtors to *him*, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'
- 6 And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'
- 7 Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'
- 8 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.
- 9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.
- 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.
- 11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*?

- 12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?
- 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. You cannot serve God and mammon."

There's no "sugar-coating" the way of the world in this parable! *Everyone* is corrupt. The *steward* (manager) is corrupt. The *debtors* are corrupt. The wealthy *landlord* is corrupt. The whole system is corrupt. Where do we find any virtue in learning how one is to live for God, without discerning in this parable an apparent contradiction? This parable lacks any condemnation of how this unjust steward handles business. In fact, Christ says disciples are to look to this as an example!

An example of what, exactly?

Leverage God-given opportunities and assets with ingenious prudence. As scheming and shrewd as the world and the world system is, so the follower of Christ should creatively and passionately pursue the use of every opportunity and asset to promote the supremacy of Christ. Christ says that the "sons of this world are more shrewd...than the sons of light." (v. 8) Put simply, disciples of Christ can learn from the scheming ways of those who do not follow Christ in their creative ability to pursue their own goals. Disciples have established a new goal—to make Christ preeminent in all things--and so their energies and resources are given by God to be invested into making the grace of Christ manifest, and to demonstrate the glory of God. The lack of ethical living is not what Christ is saying to emulate. It is the keen ability to purposefully plan ("scheme") to be faithful in living for Jesus Christ.

Romans 16:19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.

The blessings of God are given with an expectation of a return on His investment. Each follower of Christ has been given a deposit of grace by God. Often the blessings of God are squandered for self-gain, and there is no return on the investment to God for His own pleasure and glory. That is called sin. **Sin is refusing to acknowledge that we are responsible to respond to God's gracious love with serving Him lovingly and dutifully.** Grace is given (in forms of material and spiritual blessings) with the expectation that it will return in full cycle back to God in exalting His glory. Grace is not meant to be put on the curb on the dead end street of one's rebellious, self-indulgent heart.

The unscrupulous manager made deals to the debtors, and was praised by his master for doing so. This scheming sense to get the job done is the same passionate creativity that God desires to see in the heart of His children. Unlike the prodigal who wasted his father's inheritance, disciples, like stewards, are to shrewdly invest and manage opportunities so that God can be magnified. Disciples are to be wise to God's ways just as the steward was to his master's ways. They ought to seek to leverage all that they have and all that they are in the righteousness of Jesus Christ to serve their new Master. They have been given a new way to handle God's investment, and with this new way there ought to be a passionate pursuit of bringing delight to the Master.

For the disciple, serving God is a full-time, joy-filled occupation. Every living cell of his body, every breath exhaled from his lungs, every movement of his hands, every penny in his account, both casual and precious relationships, every opportunity, EVERYTHING belongs to God. We own nothing. We belong to God.

Life Application Questions:

Read these portions from the Scriptures:

Psalms 104

²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions ---

1 Chron. 29

¹⁰ Therefore David blessed the LORD before all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever.

¹¹ Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all *that is* in heaven and in earth *is Yours*; Yours *is* the kingdom, O LORD, And You are exalted as head over all.

¹² Both riches and honor *come* from You, And You reign over all. In Your hand *is* power and might; In Your hand *it is* to make great And to give strength to all.

1. What do these above passages of Scripture reveal to us about the ownership of all things?

1 Timothy

⁷ For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out.

⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

2. According to the passage above, why are we warned not to hold tightly onto the things of this world?

3. Look up these Scriptures to learn of the emphasis that God places on faithful stewardship:

- Matthew 25:14-30
- Luke 12:12-21
- Luke 6:38
- 2 Corinthians 9

Are you faithfully stewarding all of your life and livelihood to the glory of God? Do you devise ways to serve Him with great wisdom and fueled by His grace? Have you taken an accounting recently of God's gracious benevolence towards you and responded to Him with worshipfilled service? In what areas of your life are you squandering opportunities to experience the joy of serving your Heavenly Father?

