

Puzzling Parables

The Shrewd Manager

March 4, 2018



Welcome to where we're learning how to be faithful with a little!

Who do you love more: God or Money?

One is all about surrender; the other is all about control.



That's why God expects our generosity to grow with our faith.



I had an amazing week harmonizing the Gospels. After four years, the final pieces locked into place! I'll be sharing in a few weeks. But when we left off, I was facing three "floating" story-blocks in Luke; so I scoured the Gospels and finally found their "anchors". And *click*. I was going to teach the parable of The Shrewd Manager; but, turns out it's part of the disciples' apprenticeship training. But, I don't want to skip it. So, today we'll flashback to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg — I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. — Luke 16:1-12 NIV



People get hung up on this parable, because it sounds like Jesus is commending the *dishonest manager* as a *good example*. But, it's actually the *boss* who commends the shrewd manager. So, let's make this make sense. **If the boss is impressed with his manager's deceitfulness, does that make the manager good, or the boss bad?** It's like a mob boss saying: "Well, look at you. I didn't think you had the cojones."

Religious people forget that Jesus is *funny* and *surprising*; and that **He enjoys shocking the religious out of their complacency.**

When the duped master tips his hat to his swindling servant for his cunning, Jesus' boys would've been *laughing hard*, "That is so shrewd!" But *we* don't get it. "How is that *shrewd*? Won't the boss just throw the guy in prison and tell his debtors to pay up or go to jail?"



We need to be in on a few things:

Business interest could easily be 50%. Risks were high, but successful returns were *huge*; because, you had two classes: the rich and the rest. So, a rich man would charge whatever he thought the borrower could repay.



But, the Law of Moses has a restriction:

Do not charge your brother [i.e. fellow Jew] interest, whether on money or food or anything else [like olive oil and wheat] ... – Deuteronomy 23:19a NIV



Still, many **rich Jewish mob-boss types** simply ignored the Law that they claimed to respect. The kind that loved money more than God. The kind that **were listening in right then**, when Jesus told this parable and then summed it up, *by saying ...*

"No servant [like the shrewd manager] can serve two masters. [He was fired for dipping into the till – attempting to serve his boss' interests and his own self-interests] Either he will **hate the one** [his own self-interest] and **love the other**, [his boss' interest] or he will **be devoted to the one** [his own self-interest] and **despise the other** [his boss' interest]. **You cannot serve both God** [the highest and greatest interest for yourself] **and Money** [your mob boss]." **The Pharisees, who loved money**, [which means they hated God] **heard all this** and were **sneering** at Jesus. [Because they loved serving the mob boss of money over and above their own eternal self-interest] – Luke 16:13-14 NIV



Now, the boss commends his manager because he has him *over a barrel*. He did something shrewd that he knew wouldn't be undone or land him (or the businessmen) in jail. **He made the boss look really good.**



Jesus' crowd would've likely assumed that he canceled the unscriptural interest, making the boss look generous, gracious, and devout. And *that* kind of buzz is great for business!

Picture the boss going to settle with his manager, and men begin rushing up, bowing down, kissing his cheeks, shouting their praises, and proclaiming his amazing generosity and godliness.

So, what's the boss do *now*?

Throw his manager in jail and demand full payment from his debtors? Imagine *that* buzz.

[So] The master commended the dishonest manager because **he had acted shrewdly**. [He might even think twice about firing the most cherished manager in the land] **For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.** – Luke 16:8 NIV

That is, **believers who try to serve the mob boss of money as well as their own eternal interests**; and, aren't doing *even this much* in looking out for their *own interest*, and taking action, and utilizing whatever temporary means they have at their disposal.

The shrewd of this world are often more deliberate and resourceful with temporal investments than believers are with eternal ones. **The manager used the means he had, with the time he had left to secure food and shelter and the welcome reception of many.**

I tell you, **use** worldly wealth **[the mob boss' money]** to gain friends for **yourselves**, so that **when it is gone**, [i.e. when your managing job is terminated and you go to where worldly wealth can't help you] you will be **welcomed into eternal dwellings.** – Luke 16:9 NIV

It's odd; **He's not saying we can buy our way into Heaven**, but He's clearly communicating that **we'll determine the scope of our reception**. So, **who'll be receiving you when you go home?**

The shrewd manager made friends in high places. And, Jesus is encouraging us to make friends in the highest of places! **Heaven is real. Time is limited. We have a deadline.**

Our mission isn't frantic, but it's urgent. So, take action.

We're called to live a life of joy and peace, not leisure.

When they put us in that box, all our stuff stays behind.

So, Jesus is intentionally provoking us to *think out of the box!*



If you were moving to a land that only traded in nuts, and had no exchange for cash, what percentage of your wealth would you convert to nuts before you relocated? Heaven is like that. Worldly wealth is no good up there, and there's no exchange.

But, you can take as many nuts as you convert!



So who'll be waiting at your welcome party?

If you're making financial gains with no relational gains something's wrong. Take Jesus' investment tip: **convert your temporary holdings into eternal bonds** by using worldly wealth to bring praise to God.

You can't take it with you; but, you can sure send it on ahead!

Then Jesus says ...

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is **dishonest with very little** [like the manager wasting the boss’ money] will also be **dishonest with much**. [Like reducing those huge debts] – Luke 16:10 NIV

It all comes down to our *greatest and deepest devotion*: God or money.

Which do you typically sacrifice for the other?

Are you growing in generosity as you grow in your faith?

It’s not that we shouldn’t enjoy the blessings God gives us.

It’s just that the less our generosity grows the less we’re *capable*.

You just can’t serve the Giver *and* the gifts.



The manager wasn’t fired for *enjoying* the property under his care, but for wasting it as though it was his own.

When Shar and I were first married we were blessed to house-sit for a few months. It was really nice and big and furnished. **We enjoyed it as though it was our own; but, treated it as though it *wasn’t*.**



We are God’s house-sitters down here.

My kids used to fight over where they sat to watch cartoons. “That’s *my* seat!” “No, it’s *my* seat!” “Well you’re both wrong, the *whole couch* belongs to *me!* ... *I mean, God.*”

So if you have not been trustworthy in handling **worldly wealth**, [by making eternal investments] who will trust you with **true riches**? [Your welcoming committee, eternal relationships, and property of your own. In the parable of The Minas, Jesus said, “Well done my good servant! ... Take charge of ten cities.” (Lk 19:19) And in the Parable of the Talents, He said, “I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Mt 25:21)] And if you have not been trustworthy with **someone else’s property**, who will give you **property of your own**? – Luke 16:11-12 NIV

Remember: **down here, everything we own is on loan.**

So, put your well-being above the mob boss, and use the means at your temporary disposal to bless others and bring God praise.

Be gentle as doves and shrewd as serpents ... and you’ll manage.