

Luke 16:1-13¹

The Wall Street Journal quoted an anonymous wit who defined money as “an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider for everything except happiness.” The writer might have added that money is also a provoker of covetousness and competition, a wonderful servant but a terrible master. The love of money is still “a root of all kinds of evil” according to 1 Timothy 6:10, and has helped fill our world with corruption and lust according to 1 Peter 1:4.

When we read Jesus’ sermons and parables, we are struck with the fact that He had a great deal to say about material wealth. He ministered to people who, for the most part, were poor and who thought that acquiring more wealth was the solution to all their problems. Jesus was not blind to the needs of the poor, and by His example and teaching, He encouraged His followers to share what they had with others. The early church was a fellowship of people who willingly shared their possessions with the less fortunate.

Chapter 16 of Luke emphasizes that life is a stewardship, and we must use our God-given opportunities faithfully. One day we must give an account to the Lord of what we have done with all He has given to us, so we must heed what Jesus says about the right and wrong use of wealth. So the question is: can you be trusted with God’s resources?

Some Bible translations call our passage “The Parable of the Dishonest Manager” or “The Unjust Manager.” Jesus told this story to teach that His disciples must use their wealth for kingdom purposes.

This particular manager in our scripture forgot that he was a manager and began to act as if he were the owner. A manager is someone who manages another’s

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Lk 16:1-13

wealth. He does not own that wealth himself, but he has the privilege of enjoying it and using it for the profit of his master. He was a modern-day financial planner or trustee who controls the finances of an estate for the purpose of making more money for that estate. The most important thing about a steward is that he serves his master faithfully. He became a “prodigal manager” who wasted his master’s wealth. His master heard about it and immediately asked for an inventory of his goods and an audit of his books. He also fired his manager.

At the beginning of the passage the rich man viewed his manager as irresponsible. The manager was fired. The manager knew he would lose his job. He could not change the past, but he could prepare for the future by making friends of his master’s creditors so that they would take him in or give him a job when his master threw him out. He gave each of them a generous discount, provided they paid up immediately, and they were only too glad to cooperate. It appears that the ex-manager charged the rich man’s two debtors less than what was originally stated as being owed—400 instead of 800 gallons of olive oil, and 800 instead of 1,000 bushels of wheat. One commentator suggested that the manager only subtracted what he had added in interest, as his profit. The debtors only really owed the master the amount that was on the adjusted bill. The people of Israel were not allowed to make a profit off another Jew so the manager had padded the bill to put money in his own pocket. He was willing to give up a year and a half worth of what would have been a laborer’s wages for future favor and a possibility of a job!

When the rich man heard what he had done, he commended his former manager because he had acted shrewdly. The manager had not done a good thing or had he? He had been careful to plan ahead, using material things to insure a secure future. Jesus was not teaching that His disciples should be dishonest. He was teaching that

they should use material things for future spiritual benefit. This was a good lesson from a questionable example.

Before we judge this man too severely, let's examine our own lives to see how faithful we have been as managers of what God has given to us. To begin with, we are managers of the material wealth that we have, whether much or little; and we will one day have to answer to God for the way we have acquired it and used it. Can we be trusted?

Christian stewardship goes beyond paying God a tithe of our income and then using the remainder as we please. True stewardship means that we thank God for all that we have and use it as God directs. Giving God 10 percent of our income is a good way to begin our faithful stewardship, but we must remember that God should control what we do with the remaining 90 percent as well.

We are also managers of our time. The phrase "redeeming the time" comes from the business world and means "buying up the opportunity." Time is eternity, minted into precious minutes and handed to us to use either wisely or carelessly. The main lesson of this narrative is that the manager, as irresponsible as he was, used his opportunity wisely and prepared for the future.

Christians are managers of the gifts and abilities God has given us, and we must use those gifts and abilities to serve others. The thief says, "What's yours is mine—I'll take it!" The selfish person says, "What's mine is mine—I'll keep it!" But the Christian must say, "What's mine is a gift from God—I'll share it!" We are only managers and we must use our abilities to win the lost, encourage the saints, and meet the needs of hurting people.

Finally, God's people are managers of the Gospel. God has committed the treasure of God's truth to us, and we must guard this treasure and invest it in the lives of others. The enemy wants to rob the church of this treasure, and we must be alert and courageous.

Like this manager, we will one day have to give an account of our stewardship. If we have been faithful, the Lord will give us His commendation and reward; but if we have not been faithful, we will lose those blessings, even though we will be saved and enter heaven. If we are faithful managers, God will reward us generously, and that reward will bring glory to His name.

Jesus commended the man for his wise use of opportunity. “The children of this world” are experts at seizing opportunities for making money and friends and getting ahead. God’s people should take heed and be just as wise when it comes to managing the spiritual affairs of life. “The children of this world” are wiser only “in their generation”; they see the things of time, but not the things of eternity. Because as children of God we live “with eternity’s values in view,” we should be able to make far better use of our opportunities.

Jesus gave three admonitions to the Disciples who had to live with nonbelievers in the world, based on the experience of the manager. First, one should use money to win people into the kingdom. Jesus said, “The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.” Here Jesus set His disciples apart from the manager. The manager was a person of “this world,” seeking a way to make his life more comfortable. The disciples, “the people of the light,” should act in a shrewd and wise manner. Jesus plainly taught that the people of light should use worldly wealth. Jesus was saying that one is to use wealth, not store it up or be a servant of it. Wealth should be a disciple’s servant, not vice versa. The disciples were to use wealth to gain friends; the same reason the manager used the rich man’s wealth. The disciples would then be welcomed into eternal dwellings. The disciples’ wise use of wealth would help lead others to believe the message of the kingdom and bring them to accept that message.

He admonishes us to use our opportunities wisely. One of these days, life will end, and we will not be able to earn or use money. Therefore, while we have the opportunity, we must invest our money in “making friends” for the Lord. This means winning people to Christ who will one day welcome us to heaven. All of us should want to meet people in heaven who trusted Christ because we helped to pay the bill for Gospel witness around the world, starting at home. Our lives and our resources will one day end, so it behooves us to use them wisely.

Jesus’ second application is if one is faithful in the use of money, then that one can be trusted with greater things. True riches refer to the kingdom’s spiritual riches of which the disciples will partake. Jesus admonishes us to be faithful in the way you use your material wealth. He makes it clear that you cannot divorce the “spiritual” from the “material.”

Why is Jesus so concerned about the way we use money? Because money is not neutral. It is true that it can be used for good or evil, but only God can sanctify it and use it for good. Apparently by its very nature, money defiles and debases those who love it and let it control their lives.

People who are unfaithful in the way they use money are also unfaithful in the way they use the “true riches” of God’s kingdom. We cannot be faithful in our theology and at the same time be unfaithful in the way we use money. God will not commit God’s true riches to individuals or ministries that waste money and will not give an honest accounting to the people who have supported them. When it came to money, Paul was very careful that everything was honest “not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of people.”

The third application Jesus drew from the story was that a person cannot serve both God and money. As masters the two are mutually exclusive. Love for money

will drive one away from God according to 1 Timothy 6:10. Conversely, loving God will cause one not to make money one's primary concern in life.²

Jesus admonishes us to *be wholly devoted to God and single-minded*. We cannot love or serve two masters, anymore than we can walk in two directions at one time. If we choose to serve money, then we cannot serve God. If we choose to serve God, then we will not serve money. Jesus is demanding *integrity*, total devotion to God that puts Him first in everything.

If God is our Master, then money will be our servant, and we will use our resources in the will of God. But if God is not our Master, then *we will become the servants of money*, and money is a terrible master! We will start *wasting* our lives instead of *investing* them, and we will one day find ourselves "friendless" as we enter the gates of glory.

Henry Fielding wrote, "Make money your god and it will plague you like the devil!" Jesus said, "Make money your servant and use today's opportunities as investments in tomorrow's dividends." Can we be trusted? Be a wise manager! There are souls to win to the Savior, and our money can help get the job done.³

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:246

³Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 16:14