

**LESSONS FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - The Parables - Pt 11**  
**Sunday, October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 6:30 p.m. - Teaching # 2134**  
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**SHREWDNESS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

**Luke 16:1-13 - "He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. [2] And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' [3] And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. [4] I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' [5] So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' [6] He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' 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?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' [8] The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. [9] And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. [10] "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. [11] If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? [12] And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? [13] No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."**

Imagine Jesus telling this edgy story of sleazy moral corruption to His disciples. Imagine Him starting yet another story using His favorite, almost predictable plot line - ***a master and his servant***. The disciples have heard these ideas before.

The servant is corrupt. He swindles his master out of the payment he was due from his tenants. The servant feathers his own nest with his master's wealth. The servant plays the middle man - siphoning off his master's profit - making himself appear more generous - robbing the master of the loyalty and appreciation of the tenants.

Now the story was coming to an end. The disciples could see the punch line coming. They had seen what happened to wicked servants in Jesus' stories before. They could almost smell the smoke and hear the gnashing of teeth.

Then Jesus took the story in a totally different direction: **“The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light”(16:8).**

The disciples must have glanced around at each other to see what reaction would be appropriate. **“The master commended the dishonest manager...”** What in the world was that all about? How could holy Jesus turn their moral world upside down in mid parable?

Actually, there is no moral earthquake in this story. The holiness of Jesus remains sound. ***Jesus never praised the manager's righteousness or integrity.*** Our Lord ***knew*** about the secret activities of the unjust manager, in spite of his shrewdness. He only ***appeared*** to get away with his actions for a brief slice of time.

But there were still words of praise for this fast thinking crook, and that's the cutting edge of this parable. He wasn't ***moral***, but he was ***shrewd***. And it's right at this point that the parable has its application to all disciples, then and now. The whole point of the parable is found in Jesus' explanation in the last half of **verse 8**:

**Luke 16:8b** - "....**For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.**"

Jesus says there are, right now, ***two classes of people*** on planet earth. And ***only*** two. There are the ***children of this age***, and there are the ***children of the light***. The children of this age are bound in sin and darkness. They live under the wrath of God and the reality of future judgement. The Bible says they are ***"condemned already"***(John 3:18).

Then there are the ***children of the light***. The name really says it all. They aren't in the darkness anymore. They know the truth about heaven and hell. They know the truth about sin and judgement, grace and redemption. They know the blessing of peace with God and the promise of heaven. They are ***children of the light***.

But for all of that, Jesus says there is frequently, nay ***usually***, a huge contradiction in the outward life of the church in this world. He says there is a huge flaw that ***betrays the church's witness*** and ***diminishes the church's life*** in this dark world.

Here's the problem. Jesus says the church doesn't always live consistently with her beliefs and profession. The ***world*** does. But the ***church*** doesn't. The children of this age live ***consistently*** with their goals and priorities. They live to work their system. It's the children of the light who don't. They frequently say one thing and live something else. And to prove this single point Jesus tells the story of the ***wicked***, but ***shrewd*** manager.

1) **THIS CROOKED MANAGER IS A MODEL OF REALISM**

**Luke 16:1-4** - "He also said to the disciples, 'There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. [2] And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'

**[3] “And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. [4] I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.'”**

The manager knows he cannot remain in his current situation forever. He had been cooking the books for quite a while, but his employment was coming to an end. True, nothing he did was right. But at least this much is exemplary, ***he knew his time was limited.***

There’s something about a ***deadline*** that focuses energy. Time constraints give birth to urgency, even in wicked endeavors. And this manager knew he didn’t have the luxury of leisurely going about his business:

**Luke 16:5-6 - “So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' [6] He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and *sit down quickly* and write fifty.’”**

**“Sit down quickly!”** It’s like someone committing a finely timed bank heist - like someone fleeing a security guard - like prisoners escaping over the wall of a prison. Certainly each one of these activities is ***wicked***, but in each one ***time is of the essence!*** That’s Jesus’ point.

In fact, that's why Jesus picked a **wicked, underhanded manager** to star in this story. If anybody has to work fast, a crook does. That's the whole point. Time is of the essence. This unscrupulous man worked his plan. He knew what he wanted to do and he did it quickly.

What is Jesus trying to tell us? Some priorities, if they are real at all, must be **forced**. Some things must be done quickly or there's no benefit in doing them at all. Some things can't be done later on. Like this crooked manager, we Christians need a sense of **deadline** if we are to function well as children of the light.

Certainly we are called to a life of **joy** and **peace**. But we are not called to a life of **leisure**. The Christian life is an **active** life. It's not mere **activism**. It's not just **motion**. But nor is it dreamy and emotional. It is **focused** and **engaged**. It is **energetic**. It is **busy**. It may not be **willy-nilly**. It is certainly cogent and disciplined. But it is **urgent**. It's not a take-it-or-leave-it, passive existence.

Here's how Jesus planned His whole life within the framework of very pressing time constraints:

**John 9:4 - "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work."**

That is a wonderful verse. **“While it is day....”** What a great outlook on life. Each day must be **compressed** for the kingdom. Those words describe a man who resisted drifting through His days. They describe a person who felt confined by borders - who knew **time had to be stuffed with what was important**. That’s what this shrewd manager did. **He did nothing else right, but he used his present opportunity**. And Jesus praised him for it.

2) **THIS CROOKED MANAGER USED EVERY AVAILABLE MEANS TO PREPARE FOR HIS INEVITABLE FUTURE**

**Luke 16:4-7** - “I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’ [5] So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' [6] He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' 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?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.’”

Of course, everything he did was immoral. But he wasn’t being praised for his **ethics**. He was being praised for his **industry**. He used everything he could get his hands on with only one goal in mind. He was getting ready for the inevitable. **He had all his energies focused in one direction**.

That's why Jesus puts the spotlight on him. Apparently we need his example. The children of this age - ***this wicked, self-centered age*** - they work their system. You can see it every day of the week. They rise early, stay up late, skip vacations. They want the business to grow. They will borrow all monies to get it done. They want that bigger house. They will move their family to afford it. They will multiply the number of wage earners to pay for it. They want personal pleasure. They will borrow more money to buy the cottage and the new boat and the new car and the designer clothes.

Jesus says, that's what the children of this age ***do. They work their system.*** In fact, they work their system better than the children of the light.

Have you ever noticed that virtually no obstacle will stop the person on his mission up the economic ladder. Every challenge can be overcome. Setbacks are just temporary. Problems are only an incentive to a new angle of attack. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.



Yet the same person can't be bothered with his Bible because it's too dry or too hard to understand. The person who can climb Everest in the business world can't figure out how to get to church on Sunday. The child of this age, though he fail a hundred times in his quest for success, will keep at it with renewed courage and determination. Nothing deters him. Every obstacle is a challenge. But if the service is too long on Sunday, he can't muster the strength to come back next week.

That's what Jesus is talking about in this parable. The children of this world ***know how to use all their talents and energies to achieve the goals of their system.*** They attach more zeal to their puny pursuits than the children of the light do to ***pressing into the Kingdom of God.*** He uses the industry and resourcefulness of the worldly to ***rebuke*** the indifference of the Christian.

3) **JESUS CHALLENGES HIS DISCIPLES WITH CONCRETE DECISIONS TO EXPRESS COMMITMENT IN THEIR DAILY USE OF TIME AND RESOURCES**

There are truths I embrace ***generally*** but resist ***specifically***. My mother used to make us eat the broccoli we left on the side of our plate. That's what Jesus is doing in His closing remarks of this passage of Scripture:

**Luke 16:9-13 - “And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. [10] “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. [11] If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? [12] And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? [13] No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”**

Here are some closing thoughts in the order the verses present them:

- a) **Verse 9 - “And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”**

Here’s the life lesson. Everything of this world will fail you. Everything will turn to dust and leave you empty handed. The only thing worth your best efforts is ***eternity*** - “**eternal habitations.**”

- b) **Verses 10-12** - “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. [11] If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? [12] And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?”

A successful Christian life isn't found where most people look. Most Christians spend far too much time dreaming about some huge spiritual moment. The **big**, grand events aren't the ones that make you who you are. Character happens while you're not looking. The kingdom of God is formed within you by a string of ***little things done attentively and faithfully*** - “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much....”

Also, in a way that is almost too close for comfort, heavenly spirituality has an intensely ***material side*** to it. It isn't just thinking lofty, spiritual thoughts. It's about how you spend your money and use your time - “**If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? [12] And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?**”

- c) **Verse 13 - “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”**

One way or the other, **“you gotta serve somebody.”** To use Jesus’ one term, everyone will be **“devoted”** to one kingdom or the other. Nobody remains neutral. If you don’t fix personal devotion to the one, you automatically become **devoted** to the other. Devotion to something or someone is the default direction of every life.

This means only absolute, concentrated devotion to Jesus is a **safe** commitment. When I think I’ve made a deep enough commitment to Jesus as Lord, I probably haven’t gone deep enough. Just spend some time with me digesting the words of this thirteenth verse:

**Luke 16:13 - “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”**

I find myself almost haunted by that verse. Sometimes I wish I could stop thinking about the words. I know they press me farther than I am ready to follow.

Consider this. Jesus addresses those words to people who **do** claim to love and follow Him. The very first verse of this chapter sets this whole teaching as being directed to the disciples. That's what I find so troubling. This whole thirteenth verse isn't given to people who reject Jesus as Master. It is aimed at a totally different crowd. ***It's directed to people who acknowledge Jesus as Master, but try to serve another master as well.***

Here's how we know Jesus' target audience. Look deeply at His warning. What no person can do is serve **two** masters. That's what this verse cautions against. The children of this age don't **try** to serve **two** masters. That's why Jesus chooses a **crooked** worker rather than a **righteous** one. This guy is absolutely **consistent** with his character. He's living out the only kingdom he knows.

It's the children of the **light** Jesus cautions. They are the only ones who can possibly try to work **two** kingdoms at once. That's the danger Jesus sees as He looks into the faces of these followers of His. They aren't **denying** Him as Master. What Jesus wants to do here is ***stamp into their hearts what choosing Him as Master means.***

**Choosing** Jesus means ***unchoosing*** everything else. Choosing Jesus isn't hard. It's the forsaking everything else that's difficult. That's why I find this such a challenging passage. ***It tells me what I don't want to hear.*** It tells me that pressing into the Kingdom of God is as much about ***unchoosing the world*** as it is about ***choosing Jesus***. It's as much about my spending habits as my worship choruses. It's as much about my hobbies as it is my Bible memorization. It's not about how much of my life I give to Jesus. It's much more about how much of my life I keep for myself.

So here's the bottom line. If you want a summary of this whole parable in modern day terms, here it is. ***As a dearly loved child of God, one who is redeemed from this fallen world, destined for eternal habitation and reward, with only a limited amount of time and energy at your disposal, put more energy and effort into building God's eternal kingdom than Bill Gates puts into Microsoft.***

***Until*** you do, you don't know or love Jesus as much as you think. But ***when*** you do, you'll discover what it's like to be preparing your life for all the riches of eternity.