

Sermon: Can You Be Trusted?

Text: Luke 16:1-13

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Introduction: Luke uses the entire 16th chapter of his gospel to talk to us about stewardship. It is a frequent topic of Jesus' teaching. The biblical principle is that God owns everything and we only borrow, manage and hopefully grow what we have been given. That is such an easy idea to lose in the rat race. There is nothing wrong with wealth as long as it does not cloud our eyes to the needs of the kingdom. It is after all the "love" of money that is condemned by the Lord.

As you are fully aware there is a certain method of doing things in the world. Whatever you do, you need to look out for "numero uno." We have all found money I suppose. The owner of a dry cleaning shop finds a \$100 bill in a coat pocket, which places him in an ethical dilemma: should he keep all of it, or split it fifty/fifty with his partner?

It is not always easy knowing what to do. You have to look out for yourself, right? Besides, you know the saying: "Finders keepers, losers weepers."

In both stories in [Luke 16](#) we hear: "There was a rich man." No names are given, but that of a beggar, named Lazarus. The two stories are told by using Jesus favorite method of teaching: parables. The first one sometimes called the *Parable of the Unjust Steward* is said to be one of the most difficult stories in the Bible. The bad guy turns out to be the hero and main character in the story. This somewhat unscrupulous manager was guilty of wasting and squandering wealth just like the Prodigal Son. Many commentators do not even include this parable in their list because of its hard-to-explain passages. Yet, this is God's word to us today. In life:

I. There Will Be an Accounting (vv. 1-4).

[Luke 16:1-4 \(NIV\)](#) ¹Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ²So 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.' ³"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— ⁴I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

It was very common in Jesus' time for large landowners to have slaves or stewards to manage their estates especially in their absence. There were contracts let with the tenants who promised so much money or a portion of their crops back to the owner for the privilege of working his land.

The eternal principle here is: There Will Be an Accounting

A. Of what we have been entrusted (v. 1).

I Corinthians 4:2 (NIV) ²Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

If we ever forget that what we have been given by God is to be for his purposes, we are also in danger of being removed as one of God's managers.

Questions must be raised along the way. These questions go to our values. How do we use God's resources: for Him, for the good of others, or for ourselves?

This parable is directed at Jesus' disciples. "Jesus drives for a character in his disciples that reflects God's integrity, generosity, and grace." - Bock, *Luke*, p. 420

To make sure everyone understands their relationship with God: everything is his! Mismanagement demonstrates a fundamentally flawed choice of allegiance. It also gives an obvious answer to the question: "Whom do you love?"

The idea of greed is said to be idolatry.

Ephesians 5:5 (NIV) ⁵For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

There Will Be an Accounting

B. That will carry consequences (vv. 2-4)

In a matter of three verses this manager is called into the boss' office, let go from his position, and devises a game plan to recover from this awful turn of events.

The rich man already has all the information he needs to make a decision to terminate the relationship with his manager. No amount of excuses is going to change the outcome. He had been found out. No creative accounting or double set of books was going to make a difference. All along, his relationship with the owner had been a fraud.

If a person lost their job back then, there was no unemployment, government aid, medicare or medicaid - nothing to cushion the transition. You went from everything to nothing. Only friends and family might help.

II. Shrewdness Is Needed (vv. 5-8a).

This is called by some a “crisis parable.” How do you deal with a crisis? Some people kind of shut down and do nothing. Generally, though, a passive approach to a crisis is a poor solution. The manager thought: “how can I leverage my future?”

Luke 16:5-8a (NIV) ⁵“So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶“Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. ‘The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’ ⁷“Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ ⁸“A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. ‘He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’ ⁸“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.

A. It requires action (vv. 5-7).

Here again there is a variety of interpretation. One of two things happened here:

1. The manager added interest which was forbidden under Jewish law and upcharged each of the master’s debtors, and then reduced it down to leave the impression of a great bargain. (They play the same game with new & used car prices.)
2. Or, the manager may have taken the discount right out of his commission.

Whichever is the case, he was doing what he could to ingratiate these debtors to him especially. This was no small arrangement.

The first debtor’s bill was rewritten to half the original amount. According to experts the entire bill would have been over three years’ salary for the average worker. The second case could have been up to 8-9 years of wages. Certainly, neither were small amounts. (see Bock, *Luke*, p. 419)

Then the question comes: How can God lift up a dishonest manager as a model for the rest of us hearing this parable? It can not be anything unjust the steward may have done. I think it was his attitude about the future. Luke tells us that people of the world are sometimes more skilled at providing for their physical future than God's people are in providing for their spiritual lives with the Lord.

As God's children we also need to be:

B. Looking to the future (v. 8a)

And this involves "shrewdness." *Shrewd* need not mean amoral or dishonest. It may mean only clever or wise.

Matthew 10:16 (NIV) ¹⁶I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

We can learn lessons even from people who are flawed Luke tells us. Even the worst of people may still be able to teach us something about love of family, generosity or loyalty. King David certainly had been a murderer, liar, and adulterer, but still is lifted up as a model because he was said to be a man after God's own heart.

Christians are not supposed to be ignorant or naive. We are to be wise so as not to be duped by the prince of this world. We should be "prudent planners." We ought to see the big picture and what God has in store. We need to be investing with worldly wealth into growing others spiritually. How we use our money says a great deal about our relationship with God.

III. Lessons Can Be Learned (vv. 8b-13)

Luke 16:8b-13 (NIV) ^{8b}"For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. ¹⁰"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹²And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? ¹³"No servant can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money."

A. Prudence (vv. 8b-9)

Again, money is not the problem. Money is neutral. It is the *love* of money that is an affront to God. We need to be careful, wise, and thoughtful in the way we allow for the future that is coming when God will be returning to call all of his stewards and managers into account. Puritan Thomas Adams put it this way, “To part with what we cannot keep, that we may get that we cannot lose, is a good bargain. Wealth can do us no good, unless it helps us toward heaven.”

How one handles wealth has eternal consequences. A rule of thumb is the more material resources a person has, the less is his reliance on God. Just like the manager in our story the criticalness of the hour demands our immediate and prudent attention. Everything is at stake.

B. Trustworthiness (vv. 10-12)

The amount isn't the problem; it's character that is on trial and in the balance. Every business manager that has had a limit of what he could spend at one time without outside authorization knows how to break amounts down into multiple invoices and bypass the rules. For every statute there is a way around it. But God wants to know who will be truly trustworthy even when no one is watching.

The proverbs in these verses deal with the importance of being faithful. Many of us have given our children allowances for doing chores and the like. We did that to teach them how to handle small amounts of money so later they might also do well with larger amounts. It develops increased responsibility. These proverbs are an argument from lesser to greater. It is the same argument used by the Apostle Paul in the selection of leaders for the church.

I Timothy 3:4-5 (NIV) ⁴He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)

The idea of being trustworthy is in the context of the owner being away, but who is most certainly also coming back. What do we do even with the small opportunities?

C. Choose sides (v. 13)

There is no neutral territory in the spiritual realm. There are two clear choices; and one must choose. Not making a choice for God is a choice against him. Settling for apathy and low commitment is a clear choice for God's adversary.

“Money of itself is only good to be spent and shared. But people easily think that bank notes are valuable of themselves. It is ironic indeed that on our money that it says “In God We Trust.” - Hendrickx, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 196

Conclusion: If there is one thing a person can safely say: the world is efficient at promoting its values. At the end of the day, we see people of the world more determined in their mission of self-preservation than the church is about the salvation of souls. In light of this, Judgment is coming when everyone will be called to account. The Lord will come when he is least expected. Just as John the Baptist had said earlier in Luke:

Luke 3:9-10 (NIV) ⁹The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” ¹⁰“What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

“The real question is not ‘what is going to happen?’ but ‘what are we going to do?’” - Hendrickx, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 195

What is our interim strategy?

The Lord wants to know today, “can you be trusted?” If I give you something for which you would sell everything you have - to own it, what would you do with such a gift?