

Luke 16:1-13 – "The Shrewd Manager"

Text: Luke 16:1-13 (CSB) 1 He also said to the disciples: "A rich man had a manager who was accused of wasting his possessions. 2 So he called the manager in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management because you can no longer be my manager.' 3 Then the manager said to himself, 'What should I do since my master is taking the management away from me? I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg. 4 I know what I'll do so that when I'm removed from management, people will welcome me into their homes.' 5 So he summoned each one of his master's debtors. 'How much do you owe my master?' he asked the first one. 6 'A hundred measures of olive oil,' he said. 'Take your invoice,' he told him, 'sit down quickly, and write fifty.' 7 Next he asked another, 'How much do you owe?' 'A hundred measures of wheat,' he said. 'Take your invoice,' he told him, 'and write eighty.' 8 The master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own people than the children of light are. 9 And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of worldly wealth, so that when it fails, they will welcome you into eternal dwellings. 10 Whoever is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and whoever is unrighteous in very little is also unrighteous in much. 11 So if you have not been faithful with worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you what is your own? 13 No servant can serve two masters, since 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."

Key Background:

- **Jesus's Audience:** Jesus spoke this parable specifically to his disciples (v. 1), teaching them about stewardship and eternal priorities, unlike many parables directed at the crowds or religious leaders.
- **Manager/Steward Role:** In ancient times, wealthy landowners employed managers to oversee their estates, collect rents, and handle business transactions. These positions required significant trust and carried great responsibility.
- **Accusation of Waste:** The Greek word for "wasting" suggests squandering or mismanaging resources through carelessness or extravagance, not necessarily theft or fraud.
- **Accounting Demand:** Roman law required detailed financial records. The master's demand for an account was a formal audit that would determine the manager's fate.
- **Physical Labor Stigma:** Manual labor like digging was considered beneath someone of managerial status. Begging was deeply shameful in ancient culture.
- **Debt Reduction Scheme:** The manager reduced debts significantly—50% for olive oil, 20% for wheat. These were substantial commodities; 100 measures of olive oil equaled about 875 gallons.
- **Master's Praise:** Surprisingly, the master commended the manager's shrewdness, recognizing his clever planning for the future, even while acknowledging his unrighteousness.

- **Children of Light vs. This Age:** "Children of light" refers to believers, while "children of this age" describes those focused on worldly concerns and temporal success.

- **Worldly Wealth:** The term "mammon" refers to material possessions and money, often personified as a rival to God for human devotion and trust.

Questions from the Story:

- **What accusation was brought against the manager (v. 1-2)? What does this teach us about the seriousness of our stewardship responsibilities before God?**

- **How did the master respond to the accusation, and what did he demand from the manager (v. 2)? How does this remind us that we too must give account for how we handle God's resources?**

- **What was the manager's immediate concern when facing dismissal (v. 3)? What does his focus on future security teach us about planning ahead spiritually?**

- **Why did the manager reject digging and begging as options (v. 3)? How does this show us the importance of using our gifts and position while we have them?**

- **What was the manager's strategy for securing his future (v. 4-7)? How can we similarly use present opportunities to invest in eternal relationships?**

- **How much did the manager reduce each debtor's obligation (v. 6-7)? What does this generous reduction teach us about the power of grace and forgiveness in building relationships?**

- **Why did the master praise the "unrighteous manager" despite his questionable actions (v. 8)? What does this show us about God's appreciation for wise planning and decisive action?**

- **What contrast does Jesus draw between "children of this age" and "children of light" (v. 8)? How should this challenge believers to be more strategic in spiritual matters?**

- **What does Jesus mean by making "friends" through worldly wealth (v. 9)? How can we use our material resources to build relationships that have eternal significance?**

- **What connection does Jesus make between faithfulness in small things and faithfulness in much (v. 10)? How does this principle apply to how we handle both money and spiritual responsibilities?**

- **How does Jesus contrast "worldly wealth" with "true riches" (v. 11)? What are these true riches, and how does our handling of money demonstrate our readiness to receive them?**

- **What distinction does Jesus make between managing "what belongs to someone else" versus receiving "what is your own" (v. 12)? How does this apply to our role as stewards of God's resources?**

- **Why is it impossible to serve both God and money (v. 13)? What does this exclusive loyalty demand mean for how we prioritize our time, energy, and resources?**

- **What was Jesus's main point in praising the manager's shrewdness rather than condemning his dishonesty? How should this motivate us to be equally strategic in our spiritual investments?**

- **How does this parable challenge us to evaluate whether we're being as wise with eternal matters as worldly people are with temporal concerns?**
- **What does this story teach us about using present circumstances, even difficult ones, as opportunities to prepare for the future?**
- **How should this parable influence the way we view and use our material possessions and financial resources?**
- **What does Jesus's teaching about faithfulness in little things reveal about God's process of developing our spiritual maturity and trustworthiness?**