

# ***The Shrewd Manager***

Luke 16:1-17

11.13.2016

**BIG Idea: We are to manage God's wealth with eternity in mind.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

- Difficult parable to interpret. If you look at the owner as God and the manager as us, it appears like Jesus is commending a super-shady manager. "Hey this guy ripped me off in order to get ahead. Go and rip others off like him."
- ILL – How many of you have heard of Bernie Madoff - Madoff was a well-versed and active member of the financial industry when he got busted back in 2008. He started his own market maker firm in 1960 and helped launch the Nasdaq stock market. He sat on the board of National Association of Securities Dealers and advised the Securities and Exchange Commission on trading securities. It was easy to believe this 70-year-old industry veteran knew exactly what he was doing. Yet, he ended up managing the largest Ponzi scheme in history. He would promise a huge return on investment –like 50% in 90 days and then use new investors money to pay off older investors. The key was misleading people into reinvesting their profits, not cashing them out. People were told they were making huge sums of money so they would not pull their funds out. Over several decades he managed to dupe his investors out of \$65 billion. He and his wife owned four residences in New York, the Hamptons, Palm Beach and in southern France – notable assets include jewelry worth \$2.6m, a 50% share in a private jet worth \$12m and a \$39,000 Steinway grand piano, and \$7m yacht. When Madoff was arrested he had \$17m in cash in the bank. He was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to 150 years in prison for his crimes.
- Is Jesus telling us to model our wealth management after Bernie Madoff, just don't get caught? After all Jesus said the man was literally a "*dishonest manager*" (v.8).
- This parable has caused a lot of problems over the years because it seems Jesus is commending dishonesty to us. But much like the parable of the persistent widow last week, the parallels between God and us is not one-to-one in this parable. To really get at what Jesus is saying you have to work through this parable to understand what Jesus was really getting at.
- BIG IDEA - We are to manage God's wealth with eternity in mind.
- To get at what Jesus is teaching us in this parable we are going to answer a series of questions:
  - Where does my wealth come from?
  - What is my responsibility with wealth?
  - How do I use my wealth to make eternal friends? (like Jesus says in v.9)
- They are progressive and will move from theological to practical. We'll spend the most time on the last one but the first two are important in framing out the last one.

## **1. Where does my wealth come from? God**

- v.1 *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.*
- I don't want us to miss this simple but important point on the way to trying to interpret this parable. God is the rich man and all the possessions belong to him. All our wealth belongs to him.
- Now, as Americans we may say, "I made my money... I worked hard... I earned it!" But how did you get the ability to earn wealth? Did you give yourself life? Did you choose your home? Your intelligence and gifting?

- What if you had been born in Cambodia in 1965 and had “worked hard?” It wouldn’t have gotten you very far when Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge hauled you and your entire family off to death camps and exterminated you.
- Deut 8:17-18a *“Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth...”*
- So God grants us the power to even make wealth. This means, there is no wealth creation independent of God’s gifting.
- 1 Cor 4:7 – *“What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”*
- EVERYTHING we own actually belongs to God. We can live like that or we can live like the 16 year old rich kid who’s dad bought him a corvette. He drives it around full of pride as if he bought it himself.
- Jesus reinforces that what we have doesn’t belong to us...
- v.12 Jesus said, *“if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?”*
- So then, we are not owners but managers of God’s wealth.
- “*Manager*” (often translated “steward”) is a broad term for an employee or agent entrusted with the management of funds or property that belongs to another.
- So we are ALL managers, whether we recognize it or not because ALL wealth belongs to God.

## **2. What is my responsibility with wealth? Be a wise manager**

- If you are a manager then you can’t just do whatever you want to with the money. If when my kids were small I gave one of them \$20 and sent them into the store to buy milk, bread, and eggs and instead they walk out with soda, Oreos and Skittles, I’m not going to say, “close enough.” I’m going to be upset because they took the money I gave to them to use for what I wanted and they chose to buy what they wanted.
- But God doesn’t just want us to be honest managers. This text says something even more...
- v.8 *The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.*
- What was his shrewdness? Well, the manager was going to be fired and he knew it.
- vv.3-4 - *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. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.*
- The owner didn’t fire him right away but told him he would be fired. Which means, for just a little while this manager could still leverage his time and opportunity for what was coming. This shrewd manager KNEW his time was coming. He was losing sleep, he was getting ready. He began to plan and prepare with that future in mind. He wanted to be ready for that day.
- vv.4-6 *I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.* He was saying, “I am going to leverage my management ALL I can right now for what I know is coming for me. These people will then welcome me into their homes when my master kicks me out.”
- So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ A hundred measures of oil was roughly 800-900 gallons. The manager reduced the debt to 450.*

- v.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.'* The wheat owed was about 6000lbs of wheat. This is a massive debt owed. And the manager quickly reduces it.
- The actual value of the reduction in each case has been computed to equal about 1500 denarii, or 16 months' wages for a soldier or a day laborer. The manager was **RADICALLY GENEROUS** with his master's money in order to prepare for what was coming.
- What is the owners response to all of this? He saw this and thought "Brilliant, absolutely brilliant."
- Jesus says, *"For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light."*
- Shrewdness is a word pointing to wisdom for the situation. It is a skillful adaptation to circumstances that brings about the desired result.
- Jesus says, those that are NOT Christians are more shrewd in planning for their short lives in this world than most Christians are in planning for eternity.
- Wise management means managing God's wealth with eternity in mind.

### **3. How do I use wealth to make eternal friends?**

- v.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."*
- Christians do not belong to this evil age, but they can nevertheless make responsible use of "worldly wealth." Jesus called in unrighteous wealth. It is saying, it is not ultimate riches. As a matter of fact what you see in v.11 is Jesus contrasting it with true riches, which is what is eternal.
- Jesus is saying take our temporary wealth and turn it into eternal wealth. Let's talk about how to do that but first...
- Two Books:** *The Treasure Principle* by Randy Alcorn and *God and Money* by John Cortines and Gregory Baumer (John is a friend and was part of CoaH for 2 years while doing his MBA at Harvard)
- It is a mindset leading to a lifestyle.

#### **A. Remind yourself wealth will fail**

- v.9 *make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails...* "when it fails"
- How does wealth "fail"? 3 ways:
  - It disappears – have you ever gotten to the end of the month and wondered "where did all my money go?" We all feel that sometimes but when there are massive medical bills, a lost job, or some other kind of catastrophe, money can disappear quickly.
  - It disappoints – Solomon had enough money to buy anything and to do anything that money can provide. He did it all and exhausted money's ability to bring happiness. It ultimately led to disappointment. We all have felt it to one degree or other when we got something we wanted but it disappointed over time. It lost its joy.
  - It dissolves – worldly wealth is exactly that. Gold is nothing but a mineral mankind has said is valuable. Money is nothing more than paper and currency a unit of measure of worldly wealth. When Jesus comes to judge the earth, all of it will dissolve.
- Worldly wealth fails, so don't be devoted to it (v.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."*

- very next verse, Luke says that "*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.*" They were thinking, "Don't be ridiculous Jesus! Of course our money is *FOR* us.
- We should be careful that we don't worship Jesus with our lips and ridicule him by our passion for worldly wealth.
- We have to fight this!!! So easy for me to forget and I'm a pastor. We have to look at our hearts and then look at them again!
- Generosity is the anti-venom to this poison that our world feeds us everyday! It reminds us that worldly wealth will fail and isn't worth living for.

### **B. Live knowing you will be held accountable. V.11-12**

- Most of us don't know the future. Don't know what is going to happen tomorrow let alone next week. BUT this manager was told that he was going to be out of job at some point in the near future. One of the central ideas here is that there is an accounting that happened for this manager.
- You and I must remind ourselves that we WILL be held accountable... And it doesn't matter how much we have. We will be held accountable whether we have a little or a lot because it ALL belongs to God.
- We will be held accountable for using our wealth in this world to have an impact for the next.
- Michael Wilcock (commentary): "Although these things—your property, ability, time—belong to this life only, says Jesus, yet what will happen to you then, when you pass into that life, will depend on what you are doing with them here and now. Make sure that your use of them brings you into a fellowship of friends which will survive beyond death."
- Jesus is not telling us we will be held accountable to guilt us into generosity but to show us our hearts. You can't love God and money.

### **C. Generously invest in the kingdom of God (whether you have a little or a lot)**

- We make eternal friends by generously investing in the kingdom of God and Generosity is not about guilt but gratitude. Christ used his heavenly wealth to make eternal friends... Phil 2 says he gave up his heavenly glory and humbled himself by taking on the form of a man and giving himself for us on the cross. If he was so generous to us and he lives in us then there should be nothing more natural to the Christian than being generous. GOSPEL
- Luke 19- Jesus encountered a tax collector named Zaccheus... give half his wealth to the poor and if he had defrauded anyone he was going to return it 400%.
- ILL – "If you would be like Christ, give much, give often, give freely, to the vile and poor, the thankless and the undeserving. Christ is glorious and happy and so will you be. It is not your money I want, but your happiness. Remember his own word, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." – Robert Murray McCheyne, 1838
- Leads to a radical generosity. Notice, that what this manager did was really radically generous. He cut the debts owed to his master by a lot. IMPORTANT TO NOTE: "What looks financially unwise in this world may turn out to be eternally wise."
- ILL –Randy Alcorn – confederate money... Imagine you're alive at the end of the Civil War. You're living in the South, but you are a Northerner. You plan to move home as soon as the war is over. While in the South you've accumulated lots of Confederate currency. Now, suppose you know for a fact that the North is going to win the war and the end is imminent. What will you do with your Confederate money? If you're smart, there's only one answer. You should immediately cash in your Confederate currency for U.S. currency—the only money that will

have value once the war is over. Keep only enough Confederate currency to meet your short-term needs.

- We will either love our money or love others with our money.
- While Jesus is calling us to total lifestyle of generosity, Jesus' church is a very specific place Jesus calls us to be generous. We want to be generous in starting ministries. Generous in loving and serving those around us. Generosity goes beyond finance giving but it is not less than financial giving.
- This is one of the reasons why we have an offering each week in our gathering. Many of us give online but it is essential that we be reminded that generosity to Jesus' church is one of the most basic ways we make eternal friends. We as a church want to leverage what is given to see the biggest kingdom impact we can.
- For that reason we have **Finance Team** – overseeing, insuring integrity, planning budgets, etc.
- Giving to CoaH has already had an impact –every baptism we celebrate is possible because we come together, because of the way we work together, including our financial support. Every CG leader that is trained. Every church planter coaches. Every Sunday we gather here is made possible through your generosity. We have 17 people going on the Alpha retreat. That is because of your giving.
- I believe Jesus is calling all of us on to greater generosity but I realize that is a real challenge for some of you. Your personal finances are out of control. We are going to be offering a basic financing class – in 2017. The goal is equip you to be manager of the wealth God has given you, not just so you can be more generous but so you can have freedom.
- NOT about guilt today. Notice there is not one hint of guilt in this passage. Generosity is a reponse to the gospel

COMMUNION

PEOPLE IN BACK TO PRAY WITH YOU

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