

“PREPARING FOR ETERNITY”

**I. Introduction**

- A. This is generally considered to be the strangest and most difficult to understand of all of Jesus’s parables.
1. One of the things that makes this parable so puzzling is that Jesus uses the dishonest actions of this steward as a positive example.
  2. In addition, it is not entirely clear how the steward’s actions helped him get out of the difficult situation that he had gotten himself into.
  3. Furthermore, it seems strange that the rich man would actually commend the steward for what he had done.
- B. While we may not be able to come up with definitive answers to all of the questions that this passage raises, one thing that we can say for certain is that our Lord was not using this parable to commend dishonesty.
1. Though the steward’s actions certainly seem to have been underhanded, we have to remember that parables generally make one basic point about the kingdom of God.
  2. This means we should not think that every detail in a parable conveys some spiritual meaning.
  3. The point that is being made by this parable is really pretty straightforward.
  4. Jesus is using it to teach us that the way we use our material resources should be reflective of what we believe about the world to come.
  5. We should use those resources not merely to make a nice life for ourselves in the here and now, but also to prepare for eternity.

6. This is the topic that we are going to be considering as we study this passage this morning.

## II. The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

- A. The parable that Jesus sets forth here focuses on the actions of this man who served as the steward or manager of a rich man's financial affairs.
  1. A report comes to the rich man, telling him that his steward is wasting his possessions.
  2. This charge seems to be taken by the rich man as a matter of financial irresponsibility rather than outright dishonesty.
  3. After all, if he suspected his steward of dishonesty it does not seem likely that he would have given him the opportunity to further defraud him.
  4. Nevertheless, the rich man obviously believes the accusations, and he demands that the steward turn in an account of his management and resign his position.
- B. Upon being told that he is being fired, the steward begins to worry about how he is going to earn his living from this point forward.
  1. He has had it easy in his post, and he is not the kind of man who is going to be able to engage in manual labor.
  2. Moreover, he has grown accustomed to a certain standard of living, and he cannot imagine being reduced to panhandling.
  3. So he comes up with a plan that will pave the way for him to be able to continue living the good life.
  4. He calls in the people who are in debt to his master and has them re-write their bills to reflect a drastic reduction of the amount of their debt.

5. By doing this, the steward was able to ingratiate himself to these debtors and ensure that he had people who would look out for him after he lost his job.
- C. Interpreters have offered a variety of explanations of what exactly the steward was doing here.
1. I am not going to take the time to go through all of the options in this sermon.
  2. It seems to me that the best suggestion is to say that the steward had the debts re-written to reflect a removal of the interest charges.
  3. While the Mosaic law forbade Israelites from charging interest to their fellow Israelites (see Deut. 23:19-20), they came up with ways of getting around this.
  4. They said that it was okay to charge interest as long as it was mutually agreed upon between the parties and was not predatory upon the poor.
  5. But at the end of the day, it was still against the law.
  6. Because of this, the rich man would not be able to take his steward to court for reducing these debts.
  7. If the rich man did that, he would implicate himself in the crime of charging interest on these loans.
  8. There wasn't really anything the master could do about what the steward had done.
  9. If it is true that he was charging interest on loans, then he had firsthand knowledge of underhandedness.
  10. When he saw the steward's shrewdness, he had to tip his hat to him.

11. All he could do was commend the steward for outwitting him.
12. We might even surmise that the master was obliged to retain the steward after all.
13. After all, if he went ahead and dismissed the steward, he would not only look like a fool but would also be setting himself at odds with all of the people whom the steward had helped.

### III. Unrighteous Wealth and True Riches

- A. After telling this parable, Jesus proceeds to explain the point that he is using it to convey.
  1. He says, “the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.”
  2. In other words, the steward serves as an example for believers because he used the resources that he had at his disposal to advance his own interests.
  3. By doing what he did, he set himself up for a comfortable future.
  4. Now of course, Jesus is not saying that we should be selfish and earthly-minded.
  5. His point is simply that worldly people are sometimes wiser than believers are when it comes to the use of their wealth and resources.
  6. Even from a this-worldly perspective, it is sometimes wiser to use your material resources to secure other people’s favor than it is to hoard your resources or to use them only for yourself.
  7. The same principle applies when it comes to the perspective of eternity.

8. We need to beware of the temptation to live a stingy or self-indulgent life that is oblivious to others.
  9. As believers, we should use our time, our money, and our possessions in a manner that shows that we give the highest priority to eternal matters, not earthly matters.
- B. Jesus continues to explain his point by saying, “make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”
1. The reason why Jesus refers to all wealth as “unrighteous” here is not because there is something inherently unrighteous about money.
  2. He is simply drawing our attention to the corrupting influence of money, and to the unrighteous desires that are often connected with it.
  3. Wealth is meant to be put to use, but it should not merely be used for the sake of our own comfort and happiness.
  4. When we handle our finances in that manner, we are losing sight of the fact that money will eventually fail.
  5. No matter how much a person accumulates, no matter how thrifty he is, no matter how savvy he is in his investments, the day will come when his wealth is no longer of any use to him.
  6. In light of this, it is wise to use your resources to bring blessings to others.
  7. This is what Jesus refers to elsewhere as laying up treasure for yourself in heaven.
  8. Of course, this does not mean that we can secure our eternal salvation by our generosity.

9. The point is simply that our acts of generosity, though always imperfect, will be rewarded in the life to come.
  10. It is not that we could ever merit a reward, but God is pleased to give one to us because he has already accepted us on the basis of Christ's merit.
- C. Notice also how Jesus speaks of the stewardship of wealth in verse 10.
1. He says that it is a matter of handling something that is "little."
  2. In the light of eternity, earthly wealth really doesn't mean all that much.
  3. Nevertheless, how you handle your money and your possessions is important.
  4. As J.C. Ryle explains, Jesus "would have us know that little things are the best test of character and that unfaithfulness about little things is the symptom of a bad state of heart."
  5. Don't think of your money as your own possession.
  6. It is not your possession.
  7. It belongs to God.
  8. You are merely a steward.
  9. While you may have worked hard to earn it, who gave you the ability to do all of that work?
  10. While you may have been careful to save it, who gave you the wisdom and self-discipline necessary to do that?
- D. Jesus concludes his teaching here with one of his more memorable sayings: "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.”

1. Notice that Jesus does not say that the rich cannot serve God.
  2. What he says is that those who are slaves to riches cannot serve God.
  3. And it is important to remember that anyone can be enslaved to riches.
  4. It can be true of a poor man just as easily as it can be true of a rich man.
  5. A man can live for the accumulation of wealth and possessions regardless of his socioeconomic status.
  6. And the person who lives with that as his supreme purpose cannot live for God.
  7. In the words of John Calvin, “covetousness makes us the slaves of the devil.”
- E. Jesus says that faithfulness in how we use our financial resources will result in our being entrusted with “the true riches.”
1. This is a reference to the treasures of heaven, the blessing of living in eternal communion with God.
  2. God does not entrust that treasure to people whose ultimate treasure is in the things of this world.
  3. How you use your money reveals who you serve and worship.
  4. It shows where you find your supreme treasure.
  5. It indicates what you love most.

6. Of course, none of us will perfectly love God with an undivided heart in this world.
7. Still, this is what every Christian should be striving towards.
8. Strive to be wholly devoted to the Lord when it comes to the use of your material resources.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. Is my use of my resources, my time, my possessions reflective of what I believe about eternal life and the kingdom of God?
- B. That is the basic question that Jesus is raising for us in this parable.
- C. It doesn't make sense to let the things of this life have a hold on you, because none of these things will last.
- D. Heaven is the thing that should matter the most to us as Christians, because heaven is the place where we will live forever in blessed communion with God.
- E. If you were to lose everything on this earth but still have the Lord, you would have infinitely more than everyone who does not have the Lord.
- F. This leads Samuel Rutherford to write, "All that is here is condemned to die, to pass away like a snowball before a summer sun... Let the moveables go; why not? They are not yours. Fasten your grips upon the heritage." [*Letters*, 98-99]
- G. The heritage that Rutherford is talking about in that quote is the inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, the inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.