

Kingdom Currency

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[0 : 00] The parable of the dishonest manager. 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.

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. And the manager said to himself, What shall 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. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses. 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. 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 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.

[1 : 11] Open your Bibles, Luke chapter 16, and then we'll pray together. Luke chapter 16, this is right at the beginning of the chapter.

Let's pray. Good Father, we are grateful to receive your word. We are grateful to have this parable recorded for us here in the Gospel of Luke.

We're grateful for your Holy Spirit that we believe will be with us. So, Holy Spirit, we invite you to be with us, and not because you need our invitation, but because we need to be reminded that you are here, and that you intend to take this word that we have had read to us, and open it to our minds, and help us to believe it with our hearts, so that we are changed by being here together during this time of worship.

We so want to hear from you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So would you please, as we have just sang together, would you please speak, O Lord, and help us to hear your word.

We love you, and we are grateful to be your people. In Jesus' name, we give thanks. Amen. Are you familiar with the card game, Phase 10?

[2 : 44] I'm going to take that as a yes. There are 10 phases or rounds in this game, and in each round, you're trying to collect various combinations of sets or runs of cards.

And then at the end of each round, you record your points, the number of cards that you're left holding that you have not been able to play out. That becomes your score for the round, and at the end of the game, the lowest score wins.

Now, imagine that you are the scorekeeper in a game of Phase 10, and it's your mother's birthday. And so you want her to win. And so as the scores are recorded at the end of, or reported at the end of each round, when your mom gives her score, you add, or sorry, you take away 10 points from her score.

And when every other score is reported, you bump those up just a little bit by adding 10 points to every other score. What are you doing? You are cheating.

[4 : 00] You are cheating. Now, if a chef uses moldy bread and spoiled milk, but makes a real fancy-looking French toast out of that.

It might look okay. It might taste okay with enough syrup. But the chef knows. Those ingredients were not fresh.

She is also cheating. Taking something bad. Doing just enough to make it edible. What a chef does with spoiled food, an accountant can do with rotten numbers.

You can take bad financial data, you take away a little here, you add a little there, and then you serve it up as though everything is fine.

We call that cooking the books. Now, using the word cook this way goes back to 1636, a guy named the Earl of Stratford.

[5 : 17] I think that's fantastic. I don't know why we don't have Earl still. The Earl of Stratford, he said this, the proof was once clear. However, they have cooked it since.

That's the first recorded usage of the word cook to use for, like, manipulating evidence or data. This is exactly what happens in the parable that Emily just read.

Cooking the books is about shady, deceptive business practices. And that's what we see happening here. A manager cheats the business owner.

But instead of being thrown into jail, the business owner commends the manager. What?

What is actually happening here? Cheating is wrong, right? Can we all agree? Cheating is wrong?

Why would Jesus tell a story where the cheater is honored?

[6 : 31] Good question. Remember, parables are stories Jesus told to make people think. Here's the setting for our parable.

A rich man hires a steward. The Bible calls him a manager. Someone to oversee all of his business dealings.

And this manager has full authority to act on behalf of the rich man. he is conducting business as though he is the rich man himself.

You might think about Joseph in Potiphar's house. You'll remember that story. Potiphar turned over everything to Joseph and he was taking care of his entire household.

But there is a problem. This manager is accused of wasting money. Perhaps this is how a salesperson or an account manager might have an expense account tied to a credit card.

[7 : 36] And they are in trouble for spending too much money on their expense account. Too much whining and dining of the customers. Chapter 16 verse 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.

And he called him and he 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. In other words, I'm going to fire you.

verse 3. The manager said to himself, what shall I do? Since my manager is taking away, or sorry, since my master is taking away the management from me, I'm not strong enough to dig.

I'm ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.

[8 : 54] Those last two verses there, verses 3 and 4. This reminds me of the prodigal son.

Remember, he's in the pig pen and Jesus says he comes to himself.

There's a moment when it dawns on him. I'm here looking at this pig food, wishing I could eat it and my father's servants in my father's house have more than enough to eat.

What am I doing here? And then he begins talking to himself. He says, this is what I'm going to do.

Jesus, the true and better narrator, tells us what the hungry man is thinking.

If this parable was made into a musical, Josie, we would call this a soliloquy, right? A character is on stage and singing or talking their thoughts out loud as though nobody else is hearing them but the audience is getting an insight into what is happening.

The manager in his soliloquy asks an important question. What shall I do? I am losing I am losing my job. I'm too old to do manual labor.

[10 : 13] I can't go into construction. I can't pour concrete. I can't dig holes for a living. I'm too old to do that. I'm too embarrassed to ask for help.

What should I do? And then, perhaps like the Grinch, a sly smile stretches across his face and he says, I know what I'm going to do.

I know exactly what I'm going to do. Verse 5. So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, how much do you owe my master?

And he said, a hundred measures of oil. He said to him, take your bill, sit down quickly and write 50.

And then he said to another, and how much do you owe?

And he said, a hundred measures of wheat. And he said to him, take your bill and write 80. Couple of notes.

[11 : 30] First, we should note this. He is still the manager. And so, even though he is defrauding his master, it's within his authority to reduce the debts.

Second, we should note how much he reduces the debt. If you do the math, which I won't bore you with now because some of you are going back to school this week and you want to deal with math here this morning, but if you were to do the math, he reduces both debts by about 500 denarii. And if you remember from a previous parable, a denarii is about a day's wages. And so, if you do that math, each debt comes down about two years wages for a worker. This is a significant reduction in debt. You should also notice that when it says, when Jesus says he calls them one by one, we should assume that he does this with all the debtors. It is a massive reduction in their debt. How does this scheme work? Well, the expectation in their culture is that if someone shows you some kindness, some benevolence, some goodness, you will repay that.

[12:54] We might say, you scratch my back, and then I will scratch your back. So, by reducing the debts of the debtors, he is hoping that the debtors will say, I owe him one.

He did me a solid, and now I need to return the favor. before his stewardship ends, the manager selfishly uses his authority to reduce what they owe his master in order to add to good will that he hopes will come from these people that owe his master money.

I suspect that everyone listening to this parable at this point is leaning in.

They are expecting that Jesus is going to say something about the master showing up, ripping this guy to shreds, burning his house.

Something exciting is going to happen. But the rich man does not say, go to jail, go directly to jail, do not pass, go, do not collect, he doesn't say anything like that.

[14:25] Something entirely different happens. Listen to what he says to this shady self-serving manager. Verse eight, the master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.

Doesn't it seem wrong that the word commended is right next to dishonest manager? And if your Bible has red letters, it's in red letters?

Doesn't that seem wrong that Jesus would say this dishonest person is commended? To commend means to express admiration for, to praise, to give approval to.

In other words, the rich man honors this guy, praises him, affirms his behavior, slaps him on the back and says that that was well played.

Did not see that coming, but you handled that really well. notice how Jesus interprets this parable.

[15:44] It's at the end of verse number eight. Here's the second half of verse eight. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

when he realizes that he is going to lose his stewardship, the manager asks, what shall I do?

What can I do right now to secure my future? He is not commended for being a cheater. He is not commended for cooking the books.

He is commended because his concern about the future impacts his choices right now in the present. Jesus makes a comparison.

Do you see that at the end of verse eight? He makes this comparison between the sons of this world, in other words, unbelievers, and the sons of light, members of God's kingdom, believers.

[17:01] What is Jesus' point? Well, unbelievers often act more wisely in regards to the system that they are living in than believers do in relation to the kingdom of God.

Unbelievers often act more wisely in the system that they are living in than believers do in relation to the kingdom of God.

This parable's surprising turn of events is the foundation for Jesus' application in verse number nine. And I tell you, make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous wealth so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

Now, this is a difficult verse. And if we took this verse and separated it from the parable, it would make almost no sense at all. We would just have no way of really what is Jesus even talking about.

But in light of the parable and in light of the comparison that Jesus just made between the children of this world and the sons of light, what does Jesus want us to think about?

[18:46] Well, let's start with the word wealth. Wealth in the scripture, in the New Testament in particular, is the word mammon.

And it can be a neutral word, just means money, possessions, property, but mammon often carries a negative connotation. And that seems to be the case here.

If you skip down in your Bible, you just look quick, it's not on the screen, but if you just look down in your Bible, verse number 11, Jesus is about to make a contrast between unrighteous wealth, which

is what we have in our verse 9, and true riches.

He sets those up as opposites. And in verse 13, Jesus warns that money, wealth, mammon, is a potential idol. So I think we ought to understand that when Jesus says unrighteous wealth, he is thinking of this with a negative connotation.

The idea is that wealth tends to corrupt us. We are inclined to use wealth poorly, selfishly, wastefully.

[20 : 08] Wealth is more likely to lead us away from God than towards him. But if the dishonest steward can use wealth shrewdly within that system in order to secure future goodwill, how much more should citizens of God's kingdom use their wealth wealth to safeguard your eternal future.

If we were paraphrasing verse 9, you might say this, Jesus instructs his followers, put yourself in a good position through the wise use of money, which tends to lead you astray anyway, so that when it fails, when this age comes to an end, God will welcome you into his kingdom.

How you use your wealth, your money, your possessions, your property, wealth, reveals whether or not you are a citizen of the kingdom of God.

Even more so, how you use your wealth exposes whether you really believe that you will give an account to God someday for your actions here on this earth.

wealth. And although it seems so, so tightly coupled to this world and this age, stewardship of wealth is a gauge of spiritual health.

[22 : 23] Think about that. like the dishonest manager in Jesus' story, you and I should ask, what should I do?

What should I do to secure my eternal future, to secure eternal goodwill, to ensure that I will be welcomed into the kingdom of God one day? Well, Jesus so kindly helps us.

Look at verse number 10. One who is faithful, Jesus says, in a very little, is also faithful in much.

And one who is dishonest in a very little, is also dishonest in much. If then, you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the eternal, sorry, who will entrust to you the true riches?

And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? those who wisely steward worldly wealth, Jesus says, can be trusted with true spiritual riches.

[23 : 57] But if you are unwise with your wealth, unwise with your property, unfaithful with all of the good things that God has given you, why would you be expected, why would you expect to be trusted with spiritual realities of eternal significance?

To the question, what should I do? Jesus answers, be wise, be faithful with everything God gives you, so that God can entrust to you the care of souls, evangelistic opportunities, leadership of God's people, shepherding oversight within the church, be wise and faithful with everything that God gives you.

Jesus' second response to the question, what should I do, is a warning. It's in verse 13. no servant, says Jesus, 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. money. Jesus is not saying that we don't need both God and money.

And Jesus is not saying that you can't have both God and money. He is warning us that one of them will be the stronger influence in your life.

[25 : 46] One of them, either God or your wealth, your property, your possessions, the things that God entrusts to you, one of them will be the stronger influence in your life.

One of them will be your master. Think about that. Maybe this is a way we can evaluate this.

Think of the last five conversations that you have had with your spouse or with a good friend. What did you talk about during that time?

Think of the last conversation you had with a brother or a sister from the church. What topics mattered in those few minutes that you had with one another? What were the topics that came to mind?

What did you discuss together? Think about the fleeting moments that you spent with your children this week?

[26 : 57] If we could play back recordings of those conversations, would there be evidence that the kingdom of God means something to you?

would we hear proof that the gospel is shaping your attitude towards money and towards possessions, towards the things that you think matter so much?

Would we be convinced if we heard those recordings that the reality of giving an account to God shapes the way that you make daily choices?

I suspect that you already know this truth, that you cannot serve God and money. You may even be willing to give this a hearty amen.

But let me ask you, are you cooking the books? And here's what I mean. Are you putting on a show?

[28 : 10] Are you adding a little here and taking away a little there to make yourself look somehow more spiritual? Hiding the fact that there is brokenness that needs the healing that only Jesus can provide.

That there is weakness that requires the spirit's strength. need and lack in your heart that requires the grace of God.

Maybe we're trying to convince others and maybe we're even trying to convince ourselves that our spiritual health is stronger than it really is.

our father God is the giver of every good gift. Time. Time and wealth and relationships and family and influence and skills and physical strength and opportunities and most importantly his beautiful son the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the giver of all good gifts. if we hope to be faithful with these gifts then we need the Lord Jesus to reorient our hearts to the reality of his kingdom don't we?

[29 : 42] By his grace and through the Holy Spirit's power we need Jesus to reshape! our concerns our priorities maybe even our spending habits so that our lives reflect the hope of being welcomed into God's eternal dwelling place.

If the kingdom of God has come if the kingdom of God has come then one day you will give an account to God for your stewardship what attitudes what actions what investments need to change today this parable unsettles us at first doesn't it it seems to commend a man for cheating his employer but Jesus is not praising his dishonesty Jesus is pressing us to think and his application is clear use wealth wisely in light of eternity parables are the stories that Jesus told to make people think they challenge our assumptions they shake up our expectations they press us to consider what do

I really believe about God and his kingdom and his call on my life so let's stop cooking the books to cover up our spiritual neediness let's examine how we use all of the resources that God has given us let's repent of our selfishness and remember that his kingdom has come and let's embrace this truth that stewardship of wealth is a gauge of spiritual health let anyone who has ears to hear listen let's pray father as we have been confronted and challenged by Jesus words in this parable we ask that you would do work and do business in our hearts and where we feel some conviction about the way that we handle our wealth our property our possessions or when we feel some conviction about cooking the books on our own spiritual maturity would you please grant repentance fresh faith to believe that the blood of

Jesus covers all of our sins and fresh strength from the Holy Spirit from our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ resurrection power to be more and more like Jesus father it would be so easy for us to leave this place and allow these words to be something that we see that we hear that we feel something in this moment and then we walk out and we leave and we say well that was that was really something and we go about our business Holy Spirit would you please convict us and do a work in our hearts and would you start that work in me for your glory and for our good we ask this Lord Jesus Father Son and Holy Spirit it is our privilege to be here and to be under the preaching of your word and as we continue in our time of worship we ask that you would continue to be glorified in all that we do and say it is in

Jesus name that we give thanks amen