

Red Chairables

The Shrewd Manager

Part 12 – November 13, 2011

Ever been laid off? What if you were given two-weeks' notice, your bank account is low, you're not eligible for unemployment ... what do you do? What if you had access to company funds and you could cut yourself a check? You wouldn't do *that*. But in the parable of The Shrewd Manager, we meet a man in a similar situation who created his own generous "severance package".

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So 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.' 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 – I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' 'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. - *Luke 16:1-9 NIV*

I want us to thrive, in spite of this troubled economy.

So, I've chosen a handful of money-related parables to keep us focused on true wealth and riches as we head into the Christmas season.



In today's story, a wasteful white-collar worker gets the dreaded *pink-slip*. Being too feeble to dig and too prideful to beg, he buys favors with company funds (*while he still can*) so he'll be invited to dinner parties and welcomed in many warm homes, once he's out in the cold!

People get hung up on this parable, because it sounds like Jesus thinks the *bad manager* is a *good example*.

Well, two things about that ...



Parables aren't *allegories* (where *every* detail has a meaning). We're expected to get the point, and ignore the parts that don't fit. Like when we read:

... for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. - 1 Thessalonians 5:2 NIV

You don't picture *this!* We get the point (it'll be *unexpected*) and we ignore the parts that don't fit.

Secondly ... people forget that Jesus was *funny*. Many of his parables contain elements of humor and surprise - if not *shock*. When the duped master tips his hat to his swindling servant, and compliments his cunning, that's surprising *and* funny!



It reminds me of the old Warner Bros. cartoon where the sheepdog and the wolf would clock in. "Morning Sam." "Mornin' Ralph."

Then, Ralph-the-wolf would go about trying to steal Sam's sheep, and Sam would invariably pound the daylights out of him!



Once, just as Sam is about to cause *horrific* injury to Ralph, the noon-whistle blows; they stop, get their lunch pails, eat, and make small talk. Then casually walk back to where they left off, the whistle blows, and WHAM-O!

Instead of erupting in anger, the master says, "Touché' ... *Ralph.*"

Jesus' crowd is laughing and going, "That is *so* shrewd!" And we're going, "That's not funny. It's not *really* even shrewd. The boss can just recharge the debtors and throw the crook in jail." But, could he?

Business interest in Roman times could be as high as 50%, because *risks* were high and returns on successes were *huge*. A lender could charge *whatever* he thought the borrower could repay. But, a Jew is forbidden from charging interest on fellow Jews.



Do not charge your brother interest, whether on money or food or anything else ... - Deuteronomy 23:19a NIV

Still many Jews did. And some even hired gentile managers to charge and collect it for them! And Jesus is telling this story to his *Jewish* disciples (16:1) who were very aware of this.

So, because the rich man's reaction indicates his manager has him over a barrel, scholars speculate that Jesus' disciples would've assumed that the manager removed the unlawful interest. The master would look like an unrighteous fool if he punished his own manager for acting righteously on his behalf!

But that's all speculation on a side issue.

The main point is, be sharp-witted and far-sighted in managing whatever the Master has entrusted to *your* care, because your time is short! At the end of the parable, Jesus vents a little righteous steam:

For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. - *Luke 16:8 NIV*

The manager used what he had, with the little time he had left, to win friends, influence people, and to secure his next meal. And he did all that so people would joyfully receive him in a temporary, earthly home; how much more so should *we* be preparing for our *own* reception in God's eternal, heavenly home?!

That's the point! Right after he vents, Jesus sums it up.

I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone [i.e. when you're dead], you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. - *Luke 16:9 NIV*

I *love* the shocking straightforwardness of this verse! Don't spiritualize your faith clear out of reality. Heaven is *real*. Time is limited.



Are you preparing for *anyone* to joyfully receive you when you arrive?! It's not a sin to be shrewd.

If you were planning to move permanently to a place that traded nuts instead of cash, what percentage of your wealth would you convert to nuts?



Heaven is kind'a like that. Our money and our possessions are no good there ... but, we can take as many "nuts" as we can convert! What friends will be welcoming you in? Philippine orphans and/or Operation Christmas Children (who you've never even met)? Or maybe close family members, friends, classmates, and coworkers.

When they put you in that box and close the lid, all your stuff stays behind. Jesus is intentionally trying to provoke us to *think out of the box!*

You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead!

A rich believer begs God to let him bring some of his vast wealth to Heaven; so, God makes an exception and allows *one* suitcase. But, he's clever; he converts everything he owns to gold and fills the biggest suitcase he can find. There's quite a stir at the Pearly Gates! The angels gather 'round as the man opens the case and reveals the shining gold. The angels in the back call out, "What's in it?!" The ones in the front just shrug, "Asphalt."

In the very next verse, Jesus goes on to say ...

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. - *Luke 16:10 NIV*



God has invested many blessings in us. The question is: Am I a *trusted* investment? I want to be like buying Microsoft in '86 ... rather than Enron in '01! What kind of return is God getting in your marriage, at your job, with your wealth, with your lack of wealth, when you're well and when you're sick, is he getting "Microsoft" or "Enron"?

He *wants* us to enjoy what he's blessed us with, but he expects generosity to grow with our faith. And truth is, the less our generosity grows the less we enjoy what we've been given. It's like giving your kid a bag of candy to share with the neighbors. You expect him to enjoy it *and* to enjoy sharing it. But if he "pigs" it all, he'll just end up with a bellyache! And who bellyaches more than the self-centered and overindulgent?!

Past meeting basic needs, money has almost *no* correlation with happiness. It just doesn't have the power we give it credit for.

The manager wasn't fired because he *enjoyed* the property under his care; he became self-indulgent and began squandering it!

There was a rich man whose manager was accused of **wasting** his possessions. - *Luke 16:1 NIV*

He made the mistake of forgetting who actually *owned* it. Jesus immediately goes on to say ...

So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with **someone else's property**, who will give you property of your own? - *Luke 16:11-12 NIV*

Who do you suppose he's referring to? Apparently, you're going to get property that'll really and truly belong to you ... *in heaven*. Until then, you'll *manage*.

You know what it's like? Housesitting! When Shar and I were married we got to housesit for three months. It was nice and big and furnished. And we felt ... blessed! We took care of it, enjoyed it, and felt honored that the owner trusted us with it. We're God's house-sitters! I'm not the owner. I'm not even a *renter*; goodness, that's even worse! "Tub drain clogged? I'll just unhook it and let it run under the house for six months. What do I care?!" *I had a rental.*

My kids used to fight over where they sat to watch TV. "That's *my* seat!" "No, it's *my* seat!" "Well you're both wrong, the *whole couch* belongs to *me*! I mean, Shar ... I mean, God ... I'm confused."

Our time, our talents, and our treasure, it *all* belongs to God. And it's dishonest to think otherwise. Why is it, good-looking people want to take credit for the features they were born with ... but not the artificial ones they *actually* bought!

The following thing that Jesus said is ...

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. - *Luke 16:13 NIV*

Do you love God more than money? ... *Be honest with yourself.*

- Do you typically sacrifice money for God or God for money?
- Which gets your most passionate pursuit?
- Which consistently is given top priority?
- Which brings you your *deepest* security and delight?
- Are you growing in generosity ... or bellyaching?

If our love for God isn't greater than our love of money, we won't be able to be spiritually shrewd with our worldly wealth for His eternal purpose ... because it just won't matter as much.

The wages of sin is death; that's the debt mankind owes to God. The shrewd manager was only able to knock off 50% for one debtor and 20% for the other. But, *we* get to enjoy, and offer, and *enjoy* offering the *total* cancellation of debt through Christ!