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Parables of Eternal Destiny (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this Parables of Eternal Destiny discussion, Steve Gregg delves into the meaning of Luke 16, focusing on the parable of the unjust steward. He explains how money is a physical good for purchasing things in the natural sphere, but also a blessing and a test from God. Gregg explains that the steward in the parable should not be viewed as a positive example, but rather as a shrewd character who used his resources to benefit himself. Ultimately, Gregg emphasizes the importance of being faithful with the resources God has provided and using them to build everlasting habits.

Transcript

Today we're doing Luke 16. Actually, your schedule shows that we will do Luke 16 plus a few verses of Chapter 17, but I've decided that we're not going to attempt it, which means we'll have to make up for lost time somewhere else, which we can. But Luke 16 has a lot in it, and to try to take these 31 verses and then to take 10 more verses of the next chapter would require that we do nothing like justice to the material in Luke 16 or 17 verses 1-10.

So we'll content ourselves with Luke 16. Most of this chapter contains just two parables of somewhat greater length than most. There are some parables that are by only one verse or two.

These parables are somewhat longer than the average. And in between them, there is some what appears to be miscellaneous teaching, although no doubt it's relevant to the occasion. But the parables both have something in common, and I've often tried to figure out what it is.

It's not altogether obvious when you read it what they have in common. One thing they both seem to have in common is they both have something to do with money. The one thing they have in common is a rich man.

The first one begins in verse 1, there was a certain rich man. And also in verse 19, there was a certain rich man. They begin with the same line, which gives the impression that riches would appear to be the subject of both.

Furthermore, in verse 14, which falls between the two parables, it says, Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard these things, and they derided him. So it would appear that money is a key factor in both of these parables. I think that's correct to say.

But there is something more than just money. It has to do with the stewardship of money as a means of preparedness for eternity. Both of these parables, I believe, have to do with the use of your resources as a means of preparing yourself for eternity.

Now, one thing is obvious. Money doesn't get anyone into heaven. And money cannot buy any heavenly things.

Money is physical, and it's good for purchasing physical things in the natural sphere. And so, some might think it has very little to do with heaven. Certainly, the Pharisees didn't think much in terms of the spiritual implications of their riches, unless it was that they thought that made them obvious recipients of God's blessing.

Because in the Old Testament, it was the case that God said that Israel as a nation would be enriched if they were obedient to God. The Jews, I think, many of them, in their thinking, took this the wrong way, just as many modern prosperity teachers do. They look at these Old Testament promises that if Israel would be obedient to God, that they'd be a wealthy nation.

And they apply it on the individual basis and say, therefore, everybody who's obedient to God is wealthy. And everybody who's wealthy, of course, prosperity teachers wouldn't take it this far, but the Pharisees may well have among themselves that everybody who's wealthy is receiving blessings from God for his obedience or whatever. Of course, those promises that God made to Israel were corporate.

They had to do with the nation not going into debt to other nations, and the nation being an economically powerful and strong nation if they were obedient to God. In the same book, Deuteronomy, where God says that he would bless them in these ways, he also said, but the poor you will have with you always, or the poor will never depart from the land, or whatever. Which indicates that even if a nation is obedient and prosperous, there will always be individuals within it who are not.

And that will give occasion for the Jews who do have to share with those who don't have and to show their compassion to their brethren and so forth. So God can bless and prosper an entire nation if it pleases him, and yet some individuals may not have money. There is no direct connection between the amount of money a person has and the favor of God upon them.

Now it is true, and the first of these two parables may suggest this, that money is a blessing from God, but not necessarily a blessing that is a reward for good conduct or a

sign of God's approval. God, remember Jesus said he sends his rain on the just and on the unjust, and causes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good. Rain and sun are necessary things for farmers, which most people were in those days, and therefore they were blessings from God.

And he says he gives blessings to people who don't please him too. You can't tell if someone is pleasing to God so much by how much God has blessed them, but more whether they are doing what God said he wants done. Because God set the standard of knowing whether you are pleasing to God or not, it's whether you are doing the thing that God said pleases him or not.

That should be an obvious thing. So God does bless people with money, and there is another way of seeing it too. In blessing people with money, he also is testing them.

He is burdening them with something of a test that others do not have who do not have money. Jesus said it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, indicating that, and he stated as a corollary to that, it is not impossible with God to make this happen. People can get into the kingdom, actually, if they are rich, but it is nearly impossible.

It is impossible apart from God's unusual work in the situation. Just like for a camel to go through the eye of a needle is an unusual thing for God to do, he doesn't do it every day, so since that is an easier thing than for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven, we would expect there not to be too, it wouldn't be a very common phenomenon that a rich man gets in. But it is not impossible.

Nonetheless, it is hard. The richest place a hardship upon a person, and Jesus made that comment in the context of an actual rich man who had shown himself zealous to be saved. He had come running to Jesus and said, what good thing must I do to be saved? He was eager to know.

And Jesus listed a number of the commandments, and he said, do these, and you will live in the man's life. I have done all those for my youth. What else do I lack? He knew there was something missing.

And he wasn't satisfied to say, oh, okay, well, then I am in. He had more than ordinary interest in his soul for a rich man. And Jesus said, well, sell what you have and give to the poor, and then you will have treasures in heaven, and then come and follow me.

And the man did not do it. The man went away sorrowful because he had great possessions. That which he looked to for happiness actually made him sorrowful.

So we can say that riches are a burden. If God blesses you with them, count it as a blessing, but count it as a test also, something for which special grace will be needed if you hope to be saved. So it is not an unmixed blessing.

It is a blessing with responsibility. And responsibility is, if you have too much responsibility, it gets to be quite burdensome. The more money you have, the more responsible you are before God as a steward.

And that's what this first parable points out, and that is that we are all stewards. Now, actually, it's more Jesus' explanation of the parable that points it out. The parable is not so much about a Christian as about a worldly man.

He does not represent the Christian. He is presented, I think, in contrast to the Christian. Just as in one parable Jesus is teaching about the need to pray, and he talks about a widow who kept bugging a judge, whom Jesus described as an unjust judge, a judge who didn't care about righteousness, didn't care about people, didn't care about anything, but simply because he was pestered into it, he finally succumbed and gave the woman what she asked for, and Jesus used that as an appeal to be persevering in prayer.

Well, obviously, if we were to say, well, the judge represents God and the woman represents the Christian, pray and so forth, that doesn't work very well. For one thing, God is not unjust. That judge doesn't resemble God very much.

Furthermore, the woman probably doesn't resemble very much us either, because if God says no to us or ignores us and puts us off, we probably should be content. But if he hasn't told us to stop praying, if he hasn't shown a disinterest in us, but we simply haven't seen the answer yet, there's no need to stop praying yet. In any case, what I'm saying is that in some parables we might be inclined to say, well, the judge represents God, the woman represents the Christian, but that's not quite right.

The parable teaches a lesson. The lesson is that even an unjust judge, if prevailed upon, may release to the person petitioning what they want. How much more, by contrast, would God, who is not an unjust judge, do the same? What we have in the parable before us is something a little like that, because here we have a steward who is usually called the unjust steward.

Now, we are stewards, and Jesus teaches that, but this unjust steward does not represent us. It represents a son of this world as opposed to a son of life. Jesus makes a contrast when he's explaining the parable that sons of life are not, generally speaking, as shrewd in matters of finance as the sons of the world are.

And this man in the parable is very clearly one of the sons of the world, not one of the sons of life. The purpose of the parable will be to show that even the sons of the world show a certain amount of foresight and make some preparation for their future when they know they're about to be in trouble. How much more, is the idea, should a godly person use his opportunities to prepare for his eternal future? This is the message of the parable.

I haven't read the parable yet. I should have read it before making those comments, but we'll comment on it verse by verse, too. I just want to say that the parable of the unjust steward is usually regarded, and I think rightly so, as just about the most difficult parable there is of all that Jesus taught.

And the problem with the parable is not so much in understanding the story or the motivations of the person behind it, but the fact that the unjust steward gets a commendation from his master whom he has ripped off. And that's the strangest thing. But we'll talk about that.

Let's first read the story. And he said also to his disciples, there was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought against him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, what is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.

Then the steward said within himself, what shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig. I'm ashamed to beg.

I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his master's debtors to him and said to the first, how much do you owe my master? And he said, a hundred measures of oil. So he said to him, take out your bill and sit down quickly and write fifty.

Then he said to another, and how much did you owe? Do you owe? So he said, a hundred measures of wheat. And he said to him, take out your bill and write eighty. So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly.

For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of life. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much, and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.

Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? No servant can serve two masters, either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided him.

And he said to them, you are those who justify yourselves before men. But God knows your hearts, for what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. Well, first of all, let's try to ascertain what the business assumptions were of that day, so that we might get a clue as to what was going on between this steward and his master.

A steward could be a slave. In this case, the man was obviously not a slave, because he feared to be put out. A slave didn't ever have to worry about being put out.

If he did, he probably looked forward to it. This man was an employed steward. And there were both in Jewish society in ancient times.

If a man had slaves, and if one of them happened to be competent in areas of management, it would not be strange for him to put one of his slaves in charge as manager over his goods. This is, of course, what Potiphar did with Joseph when he found Joseph's capabilities. He put him over all of his house.

Now Joseph remained a slave to the end. He never owned anything or got a salary, although he was probably well-dressed, well-fed, and probably slept comfortably. To be a slave in a rich man's house and to be a steward over his property, handling all the business and money, probably, although Joseph didn't own any of it, he probably handled a lot of money like a rich man would.

Yet he was not free. Other stewards would be hired, probably if a master did not own slaves, or if he did own slaves, but none of them was capable of managing his household, he'd have to hire somebody to do it. This was a hired steward, and he'd been in the employment of this guy for some time, it would appear, because he'd put all of his eggs in one basket.

He had allowed himself to reach an age where he couldn't go out and do the hard work anymore, and yet he had not been careful in his stewardship. It appears that he had, in fact, cheated his master. Now I say it appears, because Jesus doesn't say that he had cheated him, it says that it was reported to the master that he had.

However, Jesus does later refer to the man as the unjust steward. So, in saying that, it would seem clear that the man was unjust, at least either initially, or in what he did at the end. Now, there are some ambiguities about the parable.

First of all, it's not clear whether the man was guilty at first, or not. Whether he was innocent, and then resorted to devious things to secure a future for himself, or if the opposite is true, whether he was guilty at first, and he resorted to an honest thing at the end. See, there is that possibility.

First of all, for him to go to those who owed his master money, and to say, change the bill, was not necessarily a dishonest thing. He couldn't be thrown in jail for doing this, he was still a steward. He had been announced, he had been given notice, but until he had turned in his books, he was still a steward.

What? I suppose, yeah. The master said, draw up a full accounting of your stewardship, and turn it in, because you're not going to be a steward anymore. But until he turned in his books, he was still in the employment of his master, he was still doing the accounting

to get the books in order.

Now, if the master had wanted to discharge him immediately, he would have discharged him and gotten someone else to do the books, but the man was still in the employment of his master up until the time he turned in his books, which means he was still the steward. And as a steward, it was very possible that it was in his authority to make deals. I mean, if you're a manager of a restaurant, and somebody else owns the restaurant, you're a steward of that person's property.

It is within your power, it may be, I mean, it's not unthinkable, the owner might give you the authority to decide what you're going to put on sale, and reduce the price of certain things, and buy from a different supplier if they have a better price, or whatever, or cut off one supplier and get from someone else who has a better quality product. There's all kinds of things that a manager has the right to do, and we don't know how much right this man had to do what he did, but there's no suggestion that he robbed his master further in this way. He may have had, or at least did anything illegal, he certainly made his master the poor as a result of this act, but whether he did anything he was not entitled to do, we don't know.

As a steward, still in the employment of his master, he could still make binding agreements with the people who owed his master money. His master couldn't go back to these people after he fired the steward and say, now listen, I realize he lowered your bill from \$100 to \$50, but, you know, he was acting dishonestly, he was acting as a crook, he didn't have any authority, I'm going to have to raise your bill to \$100 again. First of all, the steward knew that the master couldn't do that, or else his ploy would never work.

He was doing this to ingratiate the debtors to himself, and if he did this ploy, and then his master went and reversed it, the debtors wouldn't be ingratiated to the guy, they'd just say, oh, the guy tried a quick one that didn't work, I shall not pay the guy as much. Obviously, the changed figures that the steward worked out with the debtors were legal. He was still a legal steward until he was fired.

I mean, he had been told he was going to be fired, but he was still employed as a steward, and therefore he was able to quickly do this thing that he did. Secondly, it's not even clear that he did anything overly sneaky in the second instance, when he went to these people. His obvious motive was he didn't want to do anything else for a living that he was capable of doing, and so he wanted to get some friends.

He didn't have many friends. He thought, well, these people will owe me something if I go and do them a favor, they'll owe me, and I can go stay in their hospitality. What did he do? Well, he went and lowered the bills.

It only tells of two cases, but we are probably to assume he did it with a number of cases, possibly all the debtors. A couple of examples are given, so we'll see the kind of

thing he was doing. But he probably went to all the debtors and did something similar.

Now, he didn't just cut everyone's price in half. If he had done that, if he had just used a standard cut, you know, 50%, give me 50% of that, and we'll call it even, then we might say he was doing an artificial thing, that he was just setting a figure of how much he was going to bless them. But it's been suggested by some commentators, and I think it's a good suggestion, that since he cut one guy's bill from 100 down to 50, but in others he only cut from 100 down to 80, that what he may have been doing is adjusting, correcting dishonest figures that he had put in before.

Now, he was a wasteful and a dishonest man before it would appear, and he may have been inflating the cost. For instance, when he sold this oil or this grain to this debtor, it's possible that they really owed 80, but he said, this costs you 100. And that they really owed 50, and he said, this will cost you 100.

And he just pocketed the extra money. And now he said, uh-oh, now my books are going to be audited. I better go make this right.

And so he goes to these same people and has them corrected. Okay, I charged you 100, put it down for 80. It doesn't say in the parable whether this is the case or not, but it's possible that he was now doing something honest for a change.

We don't know. And that's what makes the parable a little difficult. Was the guy a crook at first, but he amended his ways and went ahead and got the books straightened out the way they should be at the end, and maybe paid the extra that he'd pocketed, paid it back? We don't know whether he intended to do that.

There's no knowledge of whether that was the case or not. If that's what he did, that would explain a little better why the master commended him rather than throwing him in jail or getting more angry with him. On the other hand, if he had just been accused of being guilty before and was not, or even was, and then did an additional dishonest thing the second time here, then we would expect the master not to give him any kind of commendation but just hold him in utter contempt.

Now, in other words, if the guy had made a correction on these bills, it would be at his own expense. He had already pocketed the extra money. It may be.

And these people were now going to pay less, so he was going to have to come up with the extra money and return it to them or to the master or whoever. And if that was what was going on, then he was something like repenting. Now, it wasn't real repentance because he wasn't concerned about anything but his own skin.

He was too proud to beg, and he was too weak or lazy to dig ditches. And since he was being fired under these conditions, he hardly felt that he'd have a very good portfolio to go out and find another job as a steward for someone else. I mean, if you get fired

because you're cheating or accused of cheating, it's not going to look good on your job history record.

And so he just came up with something for his own security. And Jesus indicates that this man was a son of the world rather than a son of light. In verse 8, he makes a distinction between the two.

So this man didn't really repent, though it's possible that he amended his ways and changed things in such a way that no one could really take him to court about anything. It's hard to understand exactly what the scenario was. But one thing we can see for sure is that as soon as he saw that his time was limited, that he had only a short time before he could be put out on his face in the street, he knew he had to do something.

He knew he had a little bit of opportunity left. He still had authority to be a steward for a few more maybe days, maybe a week at the most. And he knew he had to act hastily, act decisively, and make provision for his long-term future.

Now the general meaning, therefore, of what this man did was he had a little opportunity to prepare for his long-term well-being, and he used it shrewdly. He foresaw the long-term consequences of what he did. He foresaw it a little too late, in a way, but he still foresaw it because he was told he was going to die or he was going to lose his stewardship.

And therefore he used what little time he had to do such things as would secure for himself a welcome into someone else's home later, long-term. So the general lesson of the parable would be that you should realize that life is short and eternity is long. In this life you have only so much opportunity.

And if you're smart, you'll use your opportunities in such a way as to secure for yourself long-term benefits, and Jesus indicates everlasting benefits. You see, the lesson of the parable is, there's more than one lesson that Jesus gives, but verse 9, Jesus says, And I say to you, and after he tells the parable, he gives this lesson, And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, or when it fails, when you fail would mean when you die, or when it fails would mean when you run out of money, either one could be, it's different, it's a textual variance, when that happens, they may receive you into everlasting habitation. Now the reason the man did what he did, he says in verse 4, he says, is so that when I'm out of my stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

His motivation was, he wanted some place to live, long-term, the rest of his life on earth. He wanted someone to open their home to him. And so he went out and he used his opportunities to secure such kinds of allegiances and friendships that he would have a place to go afterward.

And Jesus applies it in verse 9, saying, You use your opportunities, the money you have and whatever, in such a way as to secure to yourself an eternal home that people will receive you into, so that they may receive you into eternal habitation. Now, let me just say about verse 9, there have been some commentators who felt like Jesus was speaking ironically and sarcastically in verse 9. In other words, he was advising the impossible, knowing that his listeners would know it's impossible, and knowing that they should understand exactly the opposite of what he's saying. So when he said, and I said, You make friends for yourself with unrighteous mammon.

In other words, go ahead and do what this guy did. So that when you, it fails, or when it fails, they may receive you into everlasting habitation, which they can't. This guy was received into people's houses, maybe, but not forever.

And some think Jesus is making a sarcastic remark. Go ahead, go ahead, follow this guy's example. And just see if you've got any everlasting habitation waiting for you, if you do this kind of thing.

But I don't think the commentators that say that are, I don't think they're catching it quite right. Because we're not sure the guy did anything really evil, at least in the second case. He was suspected at the beginning, and we're not quite sure about what it was he did later.

Whatever he did later was not illegal, he was not thrown in jail, he was commended by his master. Probably he set the record straight and thought, Well, if I'm going out of here, I'm going to clean up my record as best I can. I'm going to make friends with the people I've ripped off in the past.

I'm going to make restitution or whatever. And I'm going to do all I can to remove any occasion for my master's anger toward me, by making the books honest. That may be what he was doing.

In which case, and we don't know if he was or wasn't doing that. Commentators are totally, there's a whole bunch of different ideas. This steward has been compared in different commentaries with the devil and with God, with Jesus and with Paul.

And with, you know, the Pharisees. There's all kinds of applications that have been made. But I think that to make those kinds of exact applications is to choose what's usually called the allegorical approach to parables rather than understanding that a parable isn't to be understood that way.

A parable is a story that has a point to make. It is not always possible, in fact in most cases it is not, to make exact parallels between the players in the story and whoever it is that, you know, in some other situation that they represent. There is a general meaning, however, to this story and Jesus suggests that there's something wise, or shrewd at

least, about this man's behavior.

And as I said, this is what it was. He came to his senses, only too rudely and suddenly, that he's going to lose his position. He's not going to be in that comfortable place forever.

And he might as well use what he's got now, what little time he still has left, to prepare for a long-term place for himself. And that's what he did. And so Jesus says, you folks too, he was speaking to the disciples, verse 1 says, so you also, use your money.

Now it seems strange that he calls it unrighteous mammon. I'm not sure why he calls it unrighteous mammon. Mammon is an Aramaic word.

It's one of the few cases in the Bible where, there are some others in the Gospels, where Jesus used an Aramaic word and they kept it in Aramaic rather than translating it into Greek when they gave us the Gospels. Jesus probably spoke all his teachings in Aramaic, but some of the Aramaic words have not been translated into Greek in the Gospels, just one of them. Mammon is an Aramaic word that just means riches.

Some say it has a root meaning of that in which someone puts their trust, that which somebody trusts. I don't know the etymology that well, but that's what I've heard said in a commentary. So, I don't know why he calls it unrighteous mammon.

Maybe because most uses that people put it to are not righteous. I don't know, but he's obviously telling them to use it in a righteous fashion. And so we'll just not try to explain why Jesus chose to call it that.

In any case, he says, use your money in such a way that when you fail, or when it fails, when it ends, they may receive you into everlasting habitation. Now, who are they that are going to receive you into everlasting habitation? Everlasting habitation, no doubt, refers to your eternal state with God. Coming into, living in the new Jerusalem, in the new heavens, in the new earth.

That is the everlasting habitation of the saved, of the disciples. But who are they who are receiving us there? Now, the noun used just before they is friends. Make friends.

And some have felt that this means that if you use your money, and perhaps we could say your opportunities as well, since time is money, and money is time for the most part, to use your money and your assets to make friends, that is to go out and reach people for Christ, to help people be reconciled to God, to make friends of God, as it were, with people. And then when you go to heaven, they will be there to greet you and to receive you. So you go out and you win souls, you use your money for missions and things like that, and then when these people get saved, they will be there to greet you and receive you and thank you.

Once you go to heaven, they'll be there to receive you. I have sometimes thought that that might be the meaning there, but I now think probably that may not be it. I think the inhabitants of heaven are the ones who are receiving you into their habitation, and probably the angels and God himself are the ones.

Use your money in such a way as to be a friend of God, so that he and his fellow inhabitants of heaven, the angels and so forth, may receive you into heaven. The reason I would say it probably means that is in the next parable, which we will get to in a few moments, the story of Lazarus and the rich man. The poor man dies, and it says in verse 22, so it was that the beggar died and was carried by the angels to Abram's bosom.

This man went into his everlasting habitation. He was received there by the angels. The angels took him there.

So possibly when Jesus says in verse 9, so that they may receive you, he has in mind the angels and the other inhabitants of heaven. The idea was the man went out and he found people who lived in houses, made friends with them so that he could come into their house. So Jesus says, you do something like that.

You should watch out for your eternal future and your eternal well-being, and you had better make friends with the ones who live in the eternal house, so that you can be invited into it when you die. So use your money in such a way as to be friends of God, and the angels and those who live in the eternal habitation, so that they will receive you into it when they come. By the way, in the book of James, chapter 4, verse 4, it says, adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whosoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Now, who are these adulterers and adulteresses? He's not talking about people who commit physical adultery. He's talking about idolatry as adultery. He's using the term in the same sense that the prophets used in the Old Testament when they're accusing Israel of worshipping idols.

They said they're committing spiritual adultery. They're married to God, but they're worshipping other gods. That's spiritual adultery.

James is using it the same way. We are married to Christ, but if you befriend the world, Christ's enemy. If we worship the things of the world, we are committing spiritual adultery.

Notice what he says in verse 3. You ask and do not receive because you ask and miss it. You only spend it on your pleasures. Your pleasures.

Spending what you get on your pleasures is what you want to do, and that makes you a worshipper of money or a worshipper of pleasure and things that money can buy. And he calls that friendship with the world. Now, Jesus said to make friends with those who can

invite you and receive you into everlasting habitations.

The world can't do that, but God can. But you can't be a friend of God and a friend of the world, too. So it's necessary that we make friends with God, and that's going to be the opposite course that you would take if you were going to make friends with the world, because to be a friend of the world is enemy of God.

Now, let's look at a few of these other verses here. In verse 8, Luke 16, 8, it says, So the master commended the unjust druid because he had dealt shrewdly. Because this man was wise enough to look forward to the future and to use his opportunities the way he did, even though it may have cost his master something extra in his doing so.

Or maybe he intended to make up the difference himself. Maybe that's the part he had ripped off, and so he's going to charge the debtor exactly what they owed, and he's going to pay the part he ripped off back to his owner or whatever. It's hard to know.

But anyway, the guy doesn't commend him for being virtuous. He is impressed that he's a clever rascal, that he is shrewd, and that he has realized that he had but little opportunities to prepare for his future, and he used what he had. And Jesus says there, For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of life.

Now, the sons of this world, obviously, are those who aren't saved. The sons of life is a term that Jesus uses of us. We're in the light.

Our eyes have been opened. We see eternal issues better than they do. And in terms of earthly things, the sons of the world sometimes are more shrewd.

Now, I don't think that it's always the case. I think Jesus is stating something that's an irony, and it doesn't necessarily have to be this way, but it's so often true. And that is that even sinners sometimes put Christians to shame if there's something in it for them, in terms of their diligence to be good stewards or to be diligent with their money.

They have more shrewdness. They have more wisdom of that kind pertaining to the things of their generation, of their lifetime, than the sons of life do. This may be because we have our interest elsewhere.

Colossians, I think, 3.1 says that since we're raised with Christ, we should seek those things that are above and not things of the earth. We should set our affections on things above and not on things down here. And because Christians do that more than, of course, worldly people do, we don't have quite the same fascination or obsession with worldly things as others do.

And that could make us be a little bit slipshod in our handling of them, but it shouldn't. Even though we realize the relative value of material things and spiritual things, we still realize that material things are something that we have a stewardship for. And we

should be good stewards of it, just like the children of the world are.

And I think this is a little bit of a rebuke that Jesus has given to people who are, because they've come to realize that they live for another world, they feel like what's going on in this world doesn't matter. They don't have to do anything, especially diligently here because their citizenship is in heaven. But the fact is that we are here now.

Like that steward, after he was told that he's losing his stewardship, he still had a little while more before he had to give account. And we, although we know we're going to live forever with the Lord, we still have a little while more here to do something smart with what opportunities we have. And we should be at least as shrewd as the sons of this world, although we aren't doing it for the same reason.

They are shrewd and tight-fisted and careful with their money because that's all they've got. This life is all they know. We do it because we know of another life and because we want to conduct our affairs in this life in such a way that we will be pleased about what we have done when we go into the next life.

There will be a day of accounting and we know it. And therefore we should be as shrewd as others. So when Jesus said that the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of life, it's sort of a slap, sort of a rebuke to those who would be, as some people say, so heavenly-minded they're no worldly good.

I don't much care for that expression because I think most Christians are not heavenly-minded enough. They should be more heavenly-minded. But it's true that people can be so heavenly-minded they don't take care to be diligent with the opportunities they have.

They just live for another world only. And we're supposed to live for another world, but we're supposed to live in this world, using the things of this world for God so that when we give account of our stewardship we'll be able to show something for it. Now, this would be a little bit like, for example, when a preacher tries to shame his listless congregation by pointing out the example of people who cheer for their football team.

I mean, they say, well look how people out in the grand sense cheer for their team and so forth and you can't even get excited about God. I mean, to point out what an unbeliever does and say, why can't you be at least as virtuous as they are in terms of some characteristics. I remember I used to hear when I was a kid, Billy Graham and others would use this example, a letter that was apparently written by a communist, an American communist, to his fiancée.

He had moved down to Mexico to help out with the communist cause down in Mexico and he wrote a letter to his fiancée to break off their engagement. And he talked about how, he said, we communists, we just can't be distracted by things like marriage and money and things like that. We've got a great goal and we have a great cause.

And he talked as if he was talking about the kingdom of God, but he was talking about communism. And I remember preachers used to bring this up from time to time just to sort of shame Christians and say, listen, here's how committed these people are to their cause. How come we're not that committed to ours? Or Paul puts it this way comparing it with athletes.

In 1 Corinthians 9, it's in there, he says, these earthly athletes, they show temperance in all things, that is self-control in all things. And they're doing it just to get a little wreath, a corruptible crown. But we're running for an incorruptible crown.

And the implication is, shouldn't we be more diligent, more willing to make sacrifices, more willing to be self-controlled than they are? Since we have something better we're running for. And I think that that's sort of the spirit of what Jesus is saying here. Look at these worldly people.

This worldly guy is smart enough to say he needs a future and he needs to use his money and use his opportunities in such a way as to look out for his future. And worldly people are often sharper at that than Christians are. However, Christians shouldn't be less so.

Christians should be managing their affairs as stewards of God and being very careful to be faithful in what they have. He says in verse 10, I think he brings this out in verse 10, He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much. And he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.

Therefore, if you have been faithful in the unrighteous manner, that is, in the money you have here and the opportunities you have, excuse me, if you have not been faithful in unrighteous manner, who will commit to your trust true riches, that is, in your eternal habitation? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man, who will give you what is your own? Now, being faithful in that which is least and being unfaithful in that which is least is an indicator of what you'll be faithful or unfaithful in what is much. Now, what is least here, obviously, is unfaithful manner. What is much is true riches.

Now, he's saying, if you're not faithful in your administration of finances, why would God trust you with something more valuable than finances? If you're slothful and careless in your stewardship down here with what God puts into your hand here, and you don't treat it well, then how in the world do you think He's going to entrust you with more in heaven? How do you think He's going to give you an eternal real riches? If you're unjust with that which is least, He can count on you being unjust with that which is more, and why should He entrust you with more then? So the idea seems to be, you should be as diligent down here as this steward was, only for different reasons. For one thing, he was just looking out for the rest of his life. You're looking out for the rest of eternity.

And, of course, the way that he made friends was perhaps, it's hard to say exactly if he

was doing a good thing or a bad thing there, but in any case, that's not the point. There is a way to make friends with unrighteous mammon, and that's what comes out in the next parable. We'll wait a few moments until we get to that.

But notice in verse 12, Jesus said, If you have not been faithful with what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? Now, apparently what Jesus is saying is, what you have now to work with is another's. It belongs to God. It belongs to Jesus.

Everything belongs to Jesus. All authority in heaven and earth is His. The money you have, the time you have, whatever you have, it's an asset to you.

Your brains, your gifts, your skills, your good looks, whatever, what do you got? What do you have that can be used for the glory of God? Now, not all those things are equally useful or valuable, but let's face it, in the world's eyes, there are certain things that open doors, there are certain things that can be pressed into profitable use. And whatever you have is not yours. It's another man's.

You are currently entrusted with a little. If you are faithful with it, then you can be entrusted with much when Jesus comes back in the next life. But if you are unfaithful with that which you are entrusted with now, don't count on being given anything more later.

Because why should someone entrust you with more if you haven't shown yourself to be faithful to what you have at the moment? Now, what you have at the moment is another man's. Whatever you have right now is God's. It belongs to Christ.

What you are given at His coming will be yours, your own. But if you are not faithful as a steward of what is God's now, don't expect much to be given to you in the next life. That's what Jesus, I think, is saying here.

And then His statement about not serving two masters, I think, obviously we know that one from the, that's also in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, or Matthew 6, No man can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Now, the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, they also heard all these things, and they derided Him.

That word derided is a very graphic word in the Greek. It's actually they turned up their noses at Him. I mean, they literally put their noses in the air to show their contempt for what He was saying.

Now, He had not ostensibly directed His remarks toward them. He had, in fact, directed them to His disciples. In verse 1 it says He said also to His disciples.

And He told the parable to His disciples. But the Pharisees were present. And it's not

unlikely that He had a certain spin on that parable that was directed toward making them feel a bit convicted.

Because they did love money, we are told, in verse 14. They were lovers of money. And yet Jesus had just said, if you're a lover of money, you're not going to be a lover of God.

You can't love two masters. You've got to love one and hate the other. So, if you're a lover of money, you're not a lover of God.

Now, the Pharisees, in all likelihood, felt that the money that they had was given to them as a blessing from God and as a reward for being such good, righteous men. But Jesus wants to point out that that's not the way it is. Now, we know from elsewhere.

Jesus said to the Pharisees in John, chapter 5. He said, How can you believe who receive honor one from another and do not seek the honor that comes from God only? That is in John, chapter 5, verse 44. How can you believe, John 5, verse 44. How can you believe who receive honor one from another and do not seek honor that comes from God only? Now, when Jesus spoke to the Pharisees in this occasion, Luke 16, verse 15.

He said to them, You are those who justify yourselves before men. But God knows your hearts. Now, in saying God knows your hearts, he doesn't mean you're wicked in the sight of God.

Some of them no doubt were and some might not have been. The point is, though, that since God knows your hearts, it doesn't much matter whether you can justify yourself in the sight of men or not. Being just in the sight of God is what's going to matter in the final analysis.

You may convince all men around you that you're very righteous and that you're very good and that you're very godly, but it's what God's opinion is that's going to matter. He sees your hearts and he knows whether that's true or whether it isn't true. The point is, in saying you are the ones who justify yourselves in the sight of men, it may be that he's referring back to the parable again.

The unjust steward, as we usually call him, made friends with men. He went and made himself popular with people because he wanted their approval long term. He wanted their homes to be open to him.

He didn't have them as friends previously, but he went and he made friends with them. He wanted to be popular with them. And these Pharisees wanted to be popular in their own crowd.

They wanted to be popular among the other Pharisees. They wanted to be justified in each other's sight. They wanted to be included and not be excluded from the group that they belonged to.

And therefore, there's a sense which the unjust steward might look a lot like the Pharisees or that they might look a lot like him to a certain extent. The thing is, though, he says since God knows your hearts, he's suggesting that you have not made yourself rich toward God. You with your money may be convincing your fellow Pharisees and other men that you must be especially honored and rewarded once in God because you're rich, but God knows different.

And the things that you think are important are not so important with God. In fact, it says, for what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The root word of the word abomination has to do with something that is offensive to the nostrils, something that stinks.

An abomination is something that stinks. And he says, the things that are highly esteemed by men. Now, the Pharisees were trying to look good in the sight of men.