

This passage includes a man, who is lifted up by Jesus, and yet seems rather suspicious. Looking at the context of the Gospel, we realize that Jesus is telling a parable to tease out what is important in our lives. Before we can see that, my big question for this scripture is, what happens next? We have this dishonest, or shrewd manager, who essentially is throwing a hail Mary and then the boss praises him. Does he get fired next? Does the boss begin to trust him because he sees that he has potential?

If I were to imagine the rest of the story, and since you have given me the pulpit, this is exactly what I will do, I would imagine that the manager would be given a second chance because he has shown that he has some sense and from sense can give birth to trust. I would picture the boss sitting with him to explain how to better use the resources and then the shrewd manager would become trustworthy. Maybe he would even win manager of the year. So now, we may wonder in what ways we are given second chances for the things that God has trusted us with.

This parable is about how we use the gifts God has given us, a term in the church known as stewardship. We skipped over the parable of the lost sons, or prodigal son.

In the lectionary readings, we skip over it for now. Both parables deal with how someone handles their given resources, and how they squander it.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, we might think about how we are being given different treasures in our life: our family, our home, our country, and yes, our finances.

It is a parable that Jesus shares with his disciples and is preceded by another Lucan parable about the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). In both parables a subordinate, either a younger son or a slave manager (*oikonomos*), is said to have squandered (*diaskopizo*) possessions or resources that belong(ed) to the master or father (15:13b; 16:1b). In the parable of the prodigal son, the elder son, who would have received his father's inheritance had he not given it to the younger son, compares himself to a slave. He worked for his father for nothing and never disobeyed him (or squandered resources).

It seems from Luke's Gospel that God has trusted us with a great bit of confusion. We are supposed to follow the God of truth and here we are praising a dishonest master! Well, to begin with, it is important to tease out some of the words in the scripture.

First, we are unsure if the master who commended the manager was the same master as before or if it was his true master, God. Either way, it is clear that they are not talking about actual money, but instead, stewardship. At the time of Jesus' discussion with his disciples, he is recognizing the relationship between God and Israel where, in many ways, Israel has failed to be God's light in the world<sup>2</sup> It is most likely that Jesus is making the parallel between God and the master.

This week's readings are particularly poignant in that they consider money from the perspective of the rich and the poor.<sup>3</sup> We see that the rich man is concerned that his resources are being squandered, similarly, we have poor who are in debt up to their eyeballs and have no way of becoming rich. This dichotomy between rich and poor is clearly as old as time. The parable is truly about how we view our resources: no one wants them squandered and no one wants to feel

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, M.J. (2022). <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-25-3/commentary-on-luke-161-13-4>

<sup>2</sup> Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

<sup>3</sup> Clendenin, D. (2022). *Lovers of Money*. <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=3444>

constantly in debt. The parable teaches us to think of the larger picture: whether I like or dislike the actions of the shrewd manager, I must admit that he tried to do something.

The chapter in Luke ends with the story of Lazarus and the rich man.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is using a resource most people are familiar with, and desire, to point out that it is about how the resources and power are used that matters. It is often said that the Gospel of Luke shows a preferential treatment for the poor; and I am not saying that is untrue. I am saying that it is also true that the Gospel of Luke shows a preferential treatment for those who use their resources wisely. Luke is imploring us to be kind and thoughtful in our actions.

In some ways, it would be easier if the Gospel had a different ending, one where the steward erased all of the debts, he was praised and then they all went on their way. However, this ending makes it seem as though the manager is being praised for being, well, a bit on the shady side. The Greek word here, *adikia*, shows that the manager was wrong in every way. The hearer of the story might have some underlying prejudices against slaves. It is important to note that in the historical context, the debt reduction was quite significant; it is possible that the reduction amounted anywhere from between one and several years of debt.

Can you imagine if suddenly several years of your salary were given back to you? This is the type of abundance present in the passage.<sup>5</sup> Still, it is confusing why Jesus lifts up the manager. My suspicion is that what is happening in this Gospel is that Jesus is praising the development rather than the untrustworthy behavior. Also, it is important to note that Jesus frequently lifts up the downtrodden.

Furthermore, the rich man in the story may have been using illegal practices by charging interest on the loans. This practice was illegal in the eyes of Jewish Law.<sup>6</sup> As such, Jesus was likely pointing out that the Manager was making the practice fair for the borrowers. Jesus is the seeker of justice.

In actuality, this passage also speaks to how we use our resources in relationship to others: given our context.<sup>7</sup> For instance, as someone with a great deal of power in the story, the manager is said to be squandering the rich man's property. He could have used his power in the last moment to further oppress the rich man's people or to offer mercy. It is how we respond when under stress that often shows the strength of our character.

Together, we are called to be Christ's light in the world. As a church, here, on this day we must recognize that if we have someone ruling our life that is not Jesus, we will find trouble. We can serve two masters in the same way that you can play two varsity sports at the same time: not well.<sup>8</sup> One sports team will always win as far as loyalty. On this day, at this time, we are asked to consider what treasures we are given and how we use it to the glory of God.

If we are given the gift of dance, are we to use it in glory at an upcoming event? If we are given financial resources, are we to donate it to church? If we are given time, do we use it to volunteer for a ministry? And we are asked more than this, we are called to encourage others to use their gifts in the furtherment of the Kingdom of God. We are to make the burden of others

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<sup>4</sup> Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

<sup>5</sup> Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.743

<sup>6</sup> Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK. and Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.743

<sup>7</sup> Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

<sup>8</sup> Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.743

lighter. As our collect of the day says, “we are not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love heavenly things.” I pray that we work together in order to further the Kingdom of God. Amen.