

The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

Luke 16:1-2 [NIV] *“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 identification of the characters in this parable help us to understand what Christ is telling us.

The rich man is God who is Creator owner of everything that exists, that’s really rich.

Deuteronomy 10:14 [NIV] *“To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.”*

Each of us is represented as the manager of what we don’t own, our lives and possessions.

We will one day have to give account to God how we have used what God has given us stewardship over for our short period of life.

This steward was told that his stewardship was coming to an end.

We are all approaching death, and our time of judgement is always near.

Luke 16:3 [NIV] *“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”*

Without the stewardship of life we have nothing.

Luke 16:4 [NIV] *“I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.”*

Will our stewardship be something that others will appreciate because of what we have done for them during our stewardship?

Luke 16:5-7 [NIV] *“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.’”*

This steward was showing mercy to others who were in debt to the rich man, God.

I worked out how much the man who owed the master 800 gallons of olive oil and came up with £12,000.

I would be very grateful if such a debt was halved.

Our deal can be even better than that.

We can have all our debt [sin] wiped out by the sacrifice the rich man [God] made through Jesus Christ.

Luke 16:8 [NIV] *“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.”*

The rich man [God] commended the steward of his wealth for showing mercy towards others who were in debt to him.

The world's way of dealing with debt is very different, far from merciful.

The nearest this society gets to mercy is the attitude of *"I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine"*.

The selfish attitude of what is in it for me!

God's concern for the poor is found throughout scripture.

Daniel 4:27 [NIV] *"Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."*

Daniel pleaded with Nebuchadnezzar to change his ways and God gave him 12 months in which to do it, part of that repentance was to be kind to the oppressed or poor.

Luke 12:33-34 [NIV] *"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Money seen as an end in itself quickly cuts us off from God and those in need, the poor.

The key to using money wisely is to see how much we can use for God's purposes, not how much we can accumulate for ourselves.

Does God's Love touch our wallet?

Does our money free us to help those in need?

Luke 14:12-14 [NIV] *"Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

This is the expression of God's Love.

Agapé, a love that continues to flow out to others however they may respond to it.

What this steward did with his master's goods was unjust and dishonest.

But the God who is love [agape] reveals Himself as a Being who desires in us mercy not justice.

Love does **not** seek justice but repentance that is a response to our being shown mercy.

Justice was the foundation of the Old Covenant that God gave to Israel through Moses.

Matthew 5:38 [NIV] *"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'"*

This was justice at work but Christ **disowned** this Old Covenant approach.

Matthew 5:39 [NIV] *"But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."*

Christ's new command that superseded the old.

When we are wronged, often our first reaction is to get even.

The Old Covenant allowed this, but limited vengeance.

Instead, Jesus is saying, express mercy towards the one who wronged you, thus seeking to not only “*wrong footing them*”, by being surprised at your response, but seeking them to become repentant for what they have done.

This is the foundation of the New Covenant.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.*”

This is the direction that Paul was desiring us to follow.

Look at the mercy that God has extended to us and be willing to sacrifice our lives in acts of mercy towards others, the spiritual poor.

This steward was showing mercy to others that they also may respond by sacrificing their justifiable rights in acts of mercy.

This society who have lost contact with their Creator God are only demanding their “rights” and ignoring their “responsibilities” to other human beings.

Philippians 2:5-9 [NIV] “*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.*”

Christ as the Son of Man showed us the way when He became a “*sacrifice*” for us, and who is now “*living*”.

Paul tells us that such an act of mercy should be our attitude to life.

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

The unjust but merciful steward was rewarded by being welcomed by a loving and merciful God into “*eternal dwellings*”.

Shouldn’t we follow his example and show mercy to the “*spiritual poor*”, those who do not yet know their Creator God?

By laying down our lives in a “*living sacrifice*” this reflects the mercy we all have received from our Creator God who loves us all.

The “*sacrifice*” God wants us to make is that of demanding justice, the normal human reaction of seeking what we feel is our “rights”.

Romans 6:1-6 [NIV] “*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, **we too may live a new life.** If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. **For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.**”*

Such demanding of justice through the application of the law, is part of the “*old self*” that has to die, be crucified.

Only then can we live a new life with Jesus Christ, reflecting the mercy He brought to us from God the Father, with the New Covenant He died to ratify.