MEET YOURSELF IN LUKE'S PARABLES
Part 10: The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-15)

INTRO: The Wall Street Journal quoted an anonymous humorist who defined "money" as *an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven and as a universal provider for everything except happiness.* When you listen to our Lord's sermons and parables, you are struck with the fact that He had much to say about material wealth. Almost half (16 of 38) of parables address it. It seems our Lord Himself lived on the edge of poverty. For the most part, those He ministered to were poor as well. *To the poor*, He spoke of the dangers of envy and jealousy. They thought acquiring more would solve their problem. *To the wealthy*, Jesus addressed danger of greed and covetousness. He was keenly aware that if people don't handle their money, it will handle them.

The Jews (esp. Pharisees) believed that earthly prosperity and material possessions were a sure sign of God's favor. They taught "whom the Lord loves He makes rich." So they sought wealth to prove God loved them. Jesus tells a parable to "his disciples" that they needed to hear and the Pharisees "heard all as well" (vv. 1, 14).

MAIN TRUTH: *Wisdom and faithfulness with earthly possessions results in spiritual riches.* Parables is a mirror for us.

I. (16:1-8a) THE PARABLE

A. *PERPLEXING* – In many ways, this is the most puzzling parable Jesus ever spoke. It is a difficult parable to interpret.

B. *PARABLE* – Tell story. . . Business people easily identify with elements in parable – dishonest employees, kickbacks, and price-fixing. It is amazing how Jesus used these things to teach some valuable lessons.

C. *POINT* (v. 8a) – Here is jugular vein of parable. This fraud, trickster and thief is commended for being shrewd. It is important to see what is and what is not said. The master (much less the Lord) is in no way giving his seal of approval to the crooked accountant's dishonesty. He never says he is pleased by manager's unethical actions (is impressed). Instead, he is commended for being "shrewd."

1. What does "shrewd" mean? To act with insight and foresight (Matt. 7:24; 10:16 25: 1-13). The dishonest manager had this needed quality – to act decisively in the present to best position himself for the future. He was a bad man who did this well. This quality is desperately needed to live effectively in the world – shrewd saints, who act wisely with resources in the present to maximize opportunities in the future.
2. "How can we be shrewd?" This bad person teaches us some good principles in these verses to help us be shrewd saints.

II. (16:8b-15) THE PRINCIPLES / LESSONS

A. REALIZE LIFE IS A STEWARDSHIP (vv. 1-2). How much did this manager own? He was only a steward (manager). We are only managers. God is owner. He is Master, we are stewards (time, gifts, money). Stewardship goes far beyond what we give to God. It has to do with all we possess because life is a stewardship. Managers are accountable to Master. There is a final audit in the future that should effect the present. We are owners of nothing, stewards of everything.

B. ANALYZE YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES (v. 3). He knew and understood his strengths and weaknesses. He could not do physical labor and was too proud to beg. Too many are unaware or unconcerned about these. Good at what?

C. CAPITALIZE ON EVERY OPPORTUNITY (vv. 4, 8). He acted quickly and decisively to seize the moment. He used opportunity of the present to position for the future. In this sense, "the people of this world are more shrewd. . . "(v. 8b). If only Christians were as diligent and resourceful in kingdom business as worldly people are in temporal, worldly business. This world is often better served by its servants than God is by His.

D. STRATEGIZE ON WAYS TO INVEST THE MATERIAL FOR THE SPIRITUAL (v. 9). Proper use of worldly things can help others come to Christ who later welcome you into heaven. Shrewdness with money can achieve eternal goals (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

E. RECOGNIZE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE TEMPORAL (MATERIAL) AND THE ETERNAL (SPIRITUAL) (vv. 10-12).

1. (v. 10) Faithfulness is independent of amount (1 Cor. 4:2) - Character issue.
2. (v. 11) Worldly wealth is less than true riches. How we handle resources is good indicator of our spiritual condition.
3. (v. 12) Eternal rewards are effected by worldly faithfulness.

F. *PRIORITIZE YOUR DEVOTION TO GOD* (v. 13). No one can serve two masters. All serve someone or something. Money can be a wonderful servant but a terrible master. We can serve God with money; can't serve God and money. What would happen if we gave the same thought, energy, passion, ingenuity, etc., to our Christianity as we do to our vocation?

CONC: When we view our possessions as belonging to us and not the Lord, we act just like this dishonest manager. Learn to be shrewd – act decisively today because it effects tomorrow. What you get in heaven depends on how you used the things of earth.