



Diocese of Winchester

# Preach **Luke** sermon

(Year C Proper 20)  
23<sup>rd</sup> September 2007

## RELATED

Amos 8:4-7  
Psalm 113

## CONTINUOUS

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1  
Psalm 79:1-9  
1 Tim 2:1-7

## Luke 16:1-13 (NIV) The Shrewd Manager

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.

'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. 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?'

This story of a clever crime is exactly the stuff that would get a bold headline in one of today's tabloid newspapers. "*Cool and Clever embezzlement!!*" might be how one red top puts it. But as Jesus tells the parable, which has been described by one commentator as the most difficult parable in Luke's Gospel, it is not simply one of a crime, but a story with a most significant sting in its tale.

So what of the parable? Jesus, who is teaching his disciples, v1, tells of a dishonest manager who was wasting his master's possessions. The Master is rich and, unsurprisingly, he does not like what he has heard; the manager has been wasting his possessions. It's interesting to note that the word 'wasted' used in v1 is the same word that was used of the Prodigal Son back in Ch. 15.13 who wasted or squandered his Father's possessions. And so the rich man, understandably, calls in his manager, v2.

*"What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer."*

'I want to see the books', says the rich man! 'News has come to me that you have squandered my money, you have been careless collecting in the rent of the various properties I own, you have squandered my assets. You need to give an account.' This sends the manager into despair, v3.

*"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..."*

'Help', says the Manager! 'What am I going to do? I am going to have to look for alternative employment, I will need another job! But I've got no qualifications, what am I going to do? I'm facing a crisis.'

But the manager sees a way out, v4. *"I know what I'll do so that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses"* The manager, of his own initiative, calls a meeting of his master's debtors and the conversation goes something like this...

*'Look times are tough, its difficult to make ends meet, and we only made verbal agreements, I did not bother writing anything down so let's sort out our business. How much do you owe? Well how about we reduce it by 50%? How about you? OK then, well pay 75% and let's call it quits. I hope you are pleased with that? Maybe one day you will realise you owe me one. It's all written down now.'*

And so in time, v8, the Master, having heard what happened, commends the dishonest manager for his shrewdness, v8. *The Master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.*" The Master realised he had been cheated, but he commends his manager for his initiative, his shrewdness, in the way he had dealt with the debtors. He does not commend him for his dishonesty, but his shrewdness. And why? v8b

*For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of 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.*

What does the parable mean? Well our first point

### **1. Live Shrewdly in the Creator's world v 1 – 9**

Now the bible has much to say about living shrewdly and wisely in God's world. It has got lots of practical, pragmatic advice on how to live in the world. Now this is mainly found in the wisdom literature, an example of this might be something like Proverbs 24.27 *"Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that build your house"*

Go and make sure you have planted your field, then go and make your house; common sense advice. Or something else like the hardworking farmer gets the harvest, and under normal conditions its true. Work hard and you will get the reward. Now, of course, there are exceptions to the rule, the farmer whose crop is wiped out by the freak weather episode, or the lazy farmer who does little work and just strikes lucky with a bumper crop, but under normal conditions work hard and the results will come. And that is good general biblical advice for living in the created order that God has made.

What Jesus is saying in our parable is that this is the way the world works; this is how the people of the world deal with each other. Therefore as you are part of a created order, you need to ensure you also are acting in a shrewd and wise way. Therefore under the sovereignty of God, using all biblical wisdom available, you must work sensibly and shrewdly.





And so what Jesus goes onto say is that when you organise your church finances, or for the CYFA group you run, or the children's group or, in fact, your own individual finances, use your common sense and be as practical and as pragmatic as the world is. Be wise, be shrewd. You are part of a created order, you are part of the world, therefore live shrewdly as part of that world.

Like the athlete who shrewdly watches what they eat, and trains hard following a training programme. Their shrewdness and practical discipline is what gets them results. Or the musician who practices his instrument for a couple of hours each day, and goes to their lessons, their shrewdness and practical discipline is what gets them results. It's nothing new, its just pragmatic discipline.

Because we live in the created order, Jesus says we need to live shrewdly. Have a look at v 8 again. *For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of light.* Jesus says the people of this world are more shrewd than the people of light, therefore we need to live shrewdly.

So take for example the issue of who is chosen as the Church treasurer. Obviously the most important criteria is that they are godly, like any leadership position within the church, they need to be godly. But after that who do we chose? Now many churches chose an accountant or a solicitor; a safe pair of hands no doubt. But isn't an accountant's job to balance the books? Surely if we want to use God's money in the best way possible, (of course with a responsible mindset under girding all our endeavours) we want a business man or woman, an entrepreneur, stewarding the resources God has given to his church? Shrewdly and practically stewarding the money God has given the church. Is there something to learn from the way the world operates? Jesus says there is. *For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of light.*

We are living in the Creator's world and there are various creation principles that apply to everybody. We need to work those out shrewdly. For our churches, our groups, and, of course, our own life.

## 2. Live wholeheartedly under the Heavenly King v 13

Jesus now goes on to teach what the first loyalty of all his followers must be, v13. *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.*

Jesus says on the one hand we are living in the created world and are therefore part of the created order. But if we are Christians, if we have come to know and love the Lord Jesus then that will make a huge difference. Pragmatic yes, we do live in the world but also principled. We seek to live under the Heavenly King.

*You cannot serve both God and money.*





The first part of the passage, the parable has said to us there is no need to be embarrassed about money, or banks or investments or using our finances wisely. However we stand in immortal danger, for money as well as being a great tool can also be a great trap, and it can be the one we start to serve, instead of the God who has given it to us. Money can be wonderfully used and we are all to possess it, but we are not to be possessed by it.

I suppose in this way money is a bit like sex. Sex is a wonderful gift from God, to be used within the right boundaries of a loving, monogamous lifelong relationship, marriage. However we will all know of the hurt and pain of the misuse and abuse of sex, when it has not been used in the right context. So it is with money. Money can be wonderfully used and we are all to possess it, but we are not to be possessed by it.

So with the pragmatism of verses 1 – 9 we now have coupled the principle of v13. *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.*

Followers of Jesus need to live pragmatically but they are also to live wholeheartedly under the Heavenly King, and that means he alone needs our full allegiance. The pragmatism and the money cannot be the thing that controls us. The standard of our Heavenly God as laid out in v13 is what needs to be our guiding principle. Total allegiance.

Now the language of v13 might pass us by, but what is interesting is that servant is actually better understood as slave. And the distinctive aspect of a slave is that they are owned by their master. Slaves are not just underprivileged people, they are owned by somebody. And no-one can be owned by two masters! There is no 'time share' on slaves! *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.*

It's not a question of both/and but either/or. You cannot serve both God and money. And so the question I ask myself is "Who owns me?" We are all owned by someone, and we shall all be mastered by someone or something. It could be sex, or power, or popularity or political ideology. The question is "Who owns me?" One of the definitions of a Christian is that they are 'owned' by the Lord God. But you cannot be owned by the Lord God and Money; that says Jesus does not work.

If you have ever tried to get into a canoe or kayak you will know that it is a very dangerous place to be with one foot in the canoe and with one foot on the bank. You are safe if you are either in the canoe or on the bank, but with a foot in each camp it only leads to a wet and painful display of the splits.

And so it is with God. *You cannot serve both God and money.* It must be one or the other



So as we finish to summarise. Firstly we are all part of the created order. So we have to deal with money, and in the right place it's a good thing. So we all have money, the question is:

- Am I as wise and sensible as the people around me with my money?
- Have I got the shrewdness that is commended, personally and as a church?
- Am I using it in the best way possible for the Gospel?"

But secondly we are also citizens of the kingdom. We have been bought with a price, the death of the Lord Jesus, and I now belong to him.

- And so am I living under his Lordship?
- Am I just trying to serve myself, or am I seeking to serve him and see his kingdom extended?
- Am I passionate for his glory or just my own?

The question to ask as we close, Who owns you? If the Lord owns you, then he owns your money as well, and the way you use it will reflect that. However if your money owns you, and not the Lord, then that will be seen very clearly too.

### **Additional All Age Idea**

This parable could very readily be acted out by a small group (Parts would be Rich Man, Manager / Steward, 2 debtors – though you could happily create more and the items concerned could be modernised from those in the parable).

The drama could be stopped at different points e.g. After first conversation between Rich Man & Steward; after the first transaction; again after the 2<sup>nd</sup> transaction; then before the rich man responds to the manager's actions, and again after his response. At each break ask the congregation to comment on the action / feelings etc. Then sum up at the end with brief pointers to what Jesus was communicating. This whole would be the sermon!

