

CHAPTER 16

PARABLES OF THE RICH AND INFAMOUS



Luke builds on the parables in Chapter 15. Whereas the theme in Chapter 15 was joy over finding what was lost, the theme in Chapter 16 addresses the theme of the proper attitude and use of material possessions. This new theme is foreshadowed in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The younger son squandered his possessions. Now Luke presents two parables which deal with squandering and misusing wealth;

- *The Dishonest Manager.*
- *The Rich man and Lazarus.*

PARABLE OF THE DISHONEST MANAGER: Lk. 16: 1-8.

16:1 Jesus ¹ also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who was informed of accusations ² that his manager ³ was wasting ⁴ his assets. **16:2** So ⁵ he called the manager ⁶ in and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? ⁷ Turn in the account of your administration, ⁸ because you can no longer be my manager.’ **16:3** Then ⁹ the manager said to himself, ‘What should I do, since my master is taking my position ¹⁰ away from me? I’m not strong enough to dig, ¹¹ and I’m too ashamed ¹² to beg. **16:4** I know ¹³ what to do so that when I am put out of management, people will welcome me into their homes.’ **14** **16:5** So ¹⁵ he contacted ¹⁶ his master’s debtors one by one. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ **16:6** The man ¹⁷ replied, ‘A hundred measures ¹⁸ of olive oil.’ The manager ¹⁹ said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write fifty.’ ²⁰ **16:7** Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ The second man ²¹ replied, ‘A hundred measures ²² of wheat.’ The manager ²³ said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ ²⁴ **16:8** The ²⁵ master commended the dishonest ²⁶ manager because he acted shrewdly. ²⁷ For the people ²⁸ of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their contemporaries ²⁹ than the people ³⁰ of light.

Day 1:

1. What is surprising or confusing to you about this parable?

2. The manager doesn’t throw himself on his master’s mercy like the prodigal son does with his father. What does the manager do instead?

3. Jesus commends the manager’s solution for one reason: the manager used money to win friends for himself in the world to which he was committed. What then, is this lesson of this parable for us?

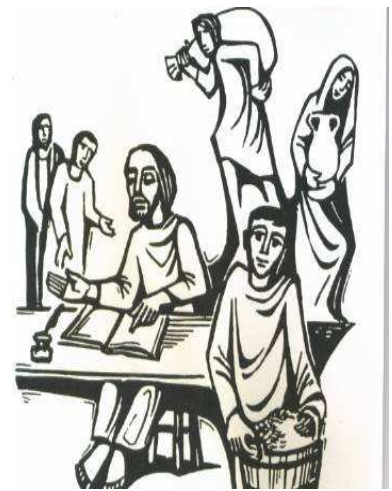
The parable of the dishonest manager can be very puzzling. Obviously, he has squandered his employer's possessions and he has been caught red handed! Why is he praised? It is his clever solution that earns the praise of his master. Even though he is committing a fraud, it is such an ingenious fraud. He is a rascal; but he is a wonderfully, clever rascal.

The key to this parable is found in verse 8, ***“For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of the light.”***

Jesus surprises his listeners into realizing that they can learn from the dishonest manager. He does not approve of the dishonesty of the steward. Nor does his parable address the destructive nature of riches. Rather he is calling his followers to be prudent, resourceful and shrewd for what is important; the Reign of God.

Jesus draws an example for the business practices of his day. To make money the children of the world go to great efforts and clever devices. How much more should a Christian prudently use the resources he has received, both materially and spiritually. How much more should a Christian strive to promote the values of God.

But why does the employer praise his dishonest manager? It was a practice in mid-eastern cultures for a salesman, administrator or manager to make a commission on transactions of his employer's business. The commission was not paid by the employer rather it was added to the client's cost. Likewise, in Jewish law it was prohibited to charge interest on money payments. To get around this law it became common practice for the manager to get payment in olive oil, wheat or other commodities. To this he would add on his commission.



In settling for 20% and 50% of the accepted cost the manager was eliminating his commission. This ingratiated him with the client who was getting a great discount on the outstanding debt. Likewise, the employer received quick and full payment for his transaction. Brilliant! The manager is not thrown in jail for his fraud and he has made friends who will welcome him after being fired by the master.

THREE APPLICATIONS OF THE PARABLE: Luke 16: 9-13.

. **16:9** And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by how you use worldly wealth, ³¹ so that when it runs out you will be welcomed ³² into the eternal homes. ³³ **16:10** “The one who is faithful in a very little ³⁴ is also faithful in much, and the one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. **16:11** If then you haven't been trustworthy ³⁵ in handling worldly wealth, ³⁶ who will entrust you with the true riches? ³⁷ **16:12** And if you haven't been trustworthy ³⁸ with someone else's property, ³⁹ who will give you your own ⁴⁰? **16:13** No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate ⁴¹ the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise ⁴² the other. You cannot serve God and money.” ⁴³

Day 2: Reflection.

1. If you won the lottery how would you more cleverly or creatively promote the Gospel in the world?

In your everyday life, even without winning the lottery how could you promote more creatively or energetically the Gospel?

2. What does, "You cannot give yourself to God and mammon" mean to you?

Luke applies three sayings of Jesus to the Parable of the Dishonest Manager.

First Application: Lk 16: 18b-9. "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation that are the children of light."

Christians can learn something important from worldly businessmen. Disciples are to make prudent use of material possessions and spiritual gifts. Also, disciples need to utilize resources, energy, creativeness and astuteness in promoting Jesus' life and mission. We have much to learn from the children of the world.



Second Application: Lk 16: 10-12. "The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones."

The manager was clever and talented but he was unfaithful in his everyday responsibilities. For that reason he would be fired from his job. Jesus' saying calls for the disciple to be faithful and responsible day by day. That is what makes one great in God's eyes and capable of giving important witness on Jesus' behalf.

Third Application: Lk 16: 13. "No servant can serve two masters."

This saying sums up a general attitude toward wealth. It makes a clear and radical point: God or mammon! Which is going to govern one's life? One who gets involved with a full pursuit of wealth becomes a slave of it. Then one is not truly free to serve God.

Day 3 The Pharisees' failures (Lk 16: 14-18)

16:14 The Pharisees⁴⁴ (who loved money) heard all this and ridiculed⁴⁵ him. **16:15** But⁴⁶ Jesus⁴⁷ said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in men's eyes,⁴⁸ but God knows your hearts. For what is highly prized⁴⁹ among men is utterly detestable⁵⁰ in God's sight. **16:16** "The law and the prophets were in force⁵¹ until John;⁵² since then,⁵³ the good news of the kingdom of God⁵⁴ has been proclaimed, and everyone is urged to enter it.⁵⁵ **16:17** But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tiny stroke of a letter⁵⁶ in the law to become void.⁵⁷ **16:18** "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries⁵⁸ someone else commits adultery, and the one who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

1. What does Jesus first saying against the Pharisees say about their attitude towards money and faithful?

2. What does Jesus say about the Pharisee's application of the law?

3. What does Jesus say about the Pharisee's attitude toward marriage?

The Pharisees and Greed.

Jesus' parable and teachings about money hit a nerve with the Pharisees. They were money lovers.

The Pharisees justified themselves in the eyes of other by giving alms. However, they were proud and jealous of the 90% of their income, which they kept. They were always looking of ways to make more money. Therefore Jesus revealed the greed that was hidden in their hearts.



The Pharisees and the Law.

Jesus states that the Kingdom of God that John the Baptist proclaimed has begun. The Old Testament has been fulfilled in the arrival of the Messiah. The Spirit of the Gospel is replacing the old Letter of the Law. The Pharisees are so closed to the Spirit that they will stick to the old ways even if heaven and earth were to pass away.

The Pharisees and Divorce.

The Pharisees did interpret many of the Laws for their own means. Such were the Laws concerning marriage and divorce. In Jesus' day women were considered possessions of their husbands. So it is fitting that this saying of Jesus is included in his teachings on misuse of possessions. Likewise, the Pharisees interpretations of the Law allowed the man to divorce his wife for insignificant reasons.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS: Lk 16: 19-31.

16:19 "There was a rich man who dressed in purple ⁵⁹ and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously ⁶⁰ every day. **16:20** But at his gate lay ⁶¹ a poor man named Lazarus ⁶² whose body was covered with sores, ⁶³ **16:21** who longed to eat ⁶⁴ what fell from the rich man's table. In addition, the dogs ⁶⁵ came and licked ⁶⁶ his sores. **16:22** "Now ⁶⁷ the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. ⁶⁸ The ⁶⁹ rich man also died and was buried. ⁷⁰ **16:23** And in hell, ⁷¹ as he was in torment, ⁷² he looked up ⁷³ and saw Abraham far off with Lazarus at his side. ⁷⁴ **16:24** So ⁷⁵ he called out, ⁷⁶ 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus ⁷⁷ to dip the tip of his finger ⁷⁸ in water and cool my tongue, because I am in anguish ⁷⁹ in this fire.' ⁸⁰ **16:25** But Abraham said, 'Child, ⁸¹

remember that in your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus likewise bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish. ⁸² **16:26** Besides all this, ⁸³ a great chasm ⁸⁴ has been fixed between us, ⁸⁵ so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ **16:27** So ⁸⁶ the rich man ⁸⁷ said, ‘Then I beg you, father – send Lazarus ⁸⁸ to my father’s house **16:28** (for I have five brothers) to warn ⁸⁹ them so that they don’t come ⁹⁰ into this place of torment.’ **16:29** But Abraham said, ⁹¹ ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they must respond to ⁹² them.’ **16:30** Then ⁹³ the rich man ⁹⁴ said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead ⁹⁵ goes to them, they will repent.’ **16:31** He ⁹⁶ replied to him, ‘If they do not respond to ⁹⁷ Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’” ⁹⁸

DAY 4. Luke 16:19-26. Just Desserts.

1. How could the rich man have attained the blessings that Lazarus received?

2. Why didn’t the rich man respond to Lazarus?



Jesus directs this parable to the Pharisees who sneered at his teaching about the use of wealth. His point is clear: one will be judged by the way one uses what one has received.

Jesus describes two men. One is immensely rich. The other is pitifully poor. The rich man is not given a name in the parable. Instead he is identified by his possessions. The poor man is named. ‘Lazarus’ is a word that means ‘God helps.’ Lazarus was insignificant

in the eyes of the world but he is important to God. Jesus knows his name. Upon death the situation of the two men is reversed. The rich man finds himself in torment. Lazarus enjoys the most honored position. He rests at the side of Abraham.

BOSOM OF ABRAHAM. Lk 16:22. Abraham is acknowledged as the Father of faith. In Jewish tradition, Abraham’s bosom is the home of the righteous. Awaiting the final judgment Abraham gathers all the blessed to enjoy the great banquet at God’s table.

HADES. Lk 16:23. In some text it is translated as the netherworld or hell. Hades is the Greek name for the underworld that awaited the wicked. The Jews adopted this name for the place that evil-doers were sent after death while they awaited God’s final judgment.

The rich man is in torment not because he was wealthy. Abraham was wealthy during his life. He is in torment because of his closed hearted neglect of the poor. During his life the rich man did not abuse Lazarus. He was not intentionally malicious towards him. His crime was worse. He completely ignored the impoverished, sick man who lay on his doorstep day after day. The rich man had the resources and power to help Lazarus. Instead he isolated himself in his own world of comfort and self-indulgence. The isolation that the rich encounters at death is a continuation of his lifestyle and decisions during his life.

Upon death, Lazarus enjoys God's full blessing. He is placed in the most honored positions, the bosom of Abraham. The parable echoes the first parable taught by Jesus, "*Blessed are the poor for theirs is the Reign of God.*" Luke, Chapter 6.

DAY 5: Luke 16: 26-31. Signs from the dead.

⁸² **16:26** Besides all this, ⁸³ a great chasm ⁸⁴ has been fixed between us, ⁸⁵ so that those who want to cross over from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' **16:27** So ⁸⁶ the rich man ⁸⁷ said, 'Then I beg you, father – send Lazarus ⁸⁸ to my father's house **16:28** (for I have five brothers) to warn ⁸⁹ them so that they don't come ⁹⁰ into this place of torment.' **16:29** But Abraham said, ⁹¹ 'They have Moses and the prophets; they must respond to ⁹² them.' **16:30** Then ⁹³ the rich man ⁹⁴ said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead ⁹⁵ goes to them, they will repent.' **16:31** He ⁹⁶ replied to him, 'If they do not respond to ⁹⁷ Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" ⁹⁸

1. Why was the rich man's request about his brothers futile?

2. What does Jesus teach you in this parable?

During his lifetime the rich man never acknowledges the impoverished man dying at his door. Now in death he calls the man by name, Lazarus. Yet even in his appeal to Abraham for compassion he remains arrogant towards Lazarus. His heart has not been moved. He refers to Lazarus not as a person but as a servant or slave that Abraham can send to ease his torment in Hades. Abraham makes it clear to the rich man he has made his own hell. The great divide of isolation was created during his life by his neglect. The rich man realizing that he cannot change his situation begs Abraham to send Lazarus as a messenger to his brothers. Such a request is futile because his brothers will be just as closed hearted as he has been. The irony is that Jesus did return from the dead after torment and injustice. Yet it did not touch the hearts of those who would not accept him during his life in their midst.

This parable makes a second point. Nothing from the outside can open a closed heart; not even if the message comes from one who comes back from the dead. The parable calls for a conversion of the heart. The conversion is promoted by the way we acknowledge, treat and share with those who are in need.