

BE A WISE MANAGER TO ADVANCE GOD'S KINGDOM

Luke 16:1-18

Key Verse: 16:9

"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

In Luke chapters 14 and 15, Jesus taught us the heart of God. Through the parable of the great banquet, we learned that God's heart is wide—wide enough to embrace all kinds of peoples, including the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, Gentiles as well as Jews. God's invitation to heaven is open to anybody and everybody. Through the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, we learned that God's love is deep—deep enough to reach the lowest sinner. God's love is unconditional toward all who come to him. A children's song summarizes God's love so well. "Deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide." God embraces repentant sinners with the grace of forgiveness of sins and clothes us with honor and glory as his own precious children. We are so happy to learn the heart of God. Knowing the love of God is one thing; practicing the love of God toward others is another. May God help us practice the love of God.

In today's passage Jesus teaches his disciples the parable of the shrewd manager. We learn that a shepherd must be a wise manager—not to accumulate worldly wealth, but to advance the kingdom of God. May God grant each of us the spirit of a wise manager so we can be better shepherds for God's children and better stewards of our nation.

First, the parable of the shrewd manager (1-8).

This parable is about a shrewd manager. It is directed toward Jesus' disciples. Jesus wanted them to become wise managers. Jesus' disciples were men of heart and they were pure. They accepted the love of God in Jesus. They wanted to follow Jesus wherever he went and be loyal to him to the end. But it seems that they had no idea about management. In the world, there are two kinds of people. One kind are wise managers. The other are stupid managers. Are some people born to be wise managers and some to be stupid managers? No. God made man in his own image to be the ruler of the world and the steward of all creation. All people have the potential to be wise managers in one way or another. Though his disciples didn't seem to have much aptitude, Jesus had hope for them to be wise managers. Wise managership can be learned. So Jesus taught them a parable.

Look at verse 1. "Jesus told his disciples: 'There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions.'" A manager must make a profit for his master as a matter of life and death. But this manager wasted his master's possessions. Probably, he was lazy and selfish. A manager must be diligent, not lazy. Proverbs 12:24 says, "Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor." Moreover, a manager must sacrifice for his master. But this man was selfish. The master trusted the manager; he did not require regular reports. The manager abused this trust and enjoyed himself in many ways. Probably he was like a former Chicago mayor who took a Florida vacation during a bad snowstorm. He did not care if his master lost money. He let people take his master's goods on credit until they piled up huge debts. Finally, his master called him into the office and said, "Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer."

In this desperate situation, suddenly, this man would become a wise manager. Look at verse 3. "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....'" To his credit, he accepted his master's words and understood his situation correctly. Some people do not accept bad news as it is. Instead, they begin to manufacture excuses and justify themselves, saying their employer or teacher is unjust. Some students, when they receive a "B" on their report card, do not admit that they deserved a "B." Instead, they blame the teacher. But this man accepted the bad news as it was. Because of this he could assess his own situation correctly.

Nevertheless, the news that he would be fired was not easy to digest. At this moment, many people become very fatalistic and are overcome by a sense of failure. They develop the "frozen brain" syndrome. But this man was different. In that adverse situation, he began to examine his options. It boiled down to two alternatives: dig the ground in manual labor or beg. But his body was too fat and soft; if he tried to dig he would have a heart attack. And he was too proud to beg. While abusing his manager's position, he had offended too many people. If they saw him begging, they would really give him a hard time.

The manager had exhausted all possibilities. It was the moment he had to surrender to the situation. At this moment many give up. But the wise manager found inspiration to overcome his situation. The difference between a manager who makes things work out and one who fails to do so is found here. Successful managers never give up. The time that others give up is the very time they find inspiration to succeed. We know Thomas Edison. Perhaps he is most famous for inventing the light bulb. In his theory, the key element was the filament; it had to be made of the proper material. He worked for two years with many different kinds of materials. He even sent men to the Amazon River basin and to Japanese forests to search for the right element. Though he failed again and again, Edison kept trying. One day, as he was fiddling with some materials at his desk, inspiration came. He found that by using a carbonized thread filament, he could make a long-lasting light bulb. So there is a saying that genius is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration, but that 1% is really important. Struggling with a problem until creative inspiration comes is essential to being a wise manager. The Muslim dance during the Christmas Worship Service was the fruit of such an idea.

Look at verses 4-7. “‘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 manager’s strategy was simple. He reduced the amounts owed to the master. Thus, he ingratiated himself to his master’s debtors and earned their favor. In the future, they would welcome him into their homes. This would solve his immediate problem and open up future employment opportunities as well.

Look at verse 8a. “The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.” At first we are surprised that the master commended the manager. The manager virtually stole his master’s possessions and used them for himself. His act was clearly dishonest. Still, the master commended him. It was for his shrewdness. Worldly people really admire those who are shrewd—those who can turn the adverse situation around to a time of success. At the same time, Jesus said clearly that the man was dishonest.

Verse 8b tells us why Jesus was telling this parable. It says, “For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.” Jesus challenges his people to be shrewd, not dishonest. In Matthew 10:16b Jesus said, “Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” Jesus’ disciples must be wise managers who make things work out in impossible situations. Actually, we have resources that are not available to worldly people. We have the power of prayer and the word of God, as well as many servants of God around us. We must make things work out by depending on God.

Second, use worldly wealth to gain eternal friends (9-13)

When Jesus taught his disciples to be wise managers, it was not so they would abandon gospel ministry and become rich businessmen. It was to equip them to advance the kingdom of God. Let’s read verse 9 together. “I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

Jesus wants his people to be as wise in doing God’s work as worldly people are in pursuing their own interests. What is worldly wealth? Of course, it is money. But it is more than that. It is all the things at our disposal in this lifetime that can be used to make a profit for God. It includes our time, our talents, our resources. Most of all, it includes our hearts, minds, souls and strength (Dt 6:5). Jesus strongly urges us to use worldly wealth for God’s work. But there are so many Christians who let their gifts and resources lay dormant. They live habitually from day to day, happy when they have enough to eat and a warm place to sleep. In them is the potential to be a wise manager who can advance the kingdom of God. But they squander what God has given in laziness and selfishness. The things that we enjoy so freely now, we cannot keep for long. Time is fleeting, the moments are passing. Jesus wants us to wake up from our slumber and use our worldly wealth for the work of God. We must have a sense of urgency, like the man in the parable. John Wesley decided to live a holy life and to serve God with all his heart. He realized that how he spent his time was really important. So he began to write a daily journal of his activities. It was for his personal discipline. Frequently, he reviewed it and repented for not making the best use of his time. Jonathan Edwards made a similar decision when he was young. It was never to spend one moment in idleness, but to make the most of each hour and each minute every day. We know how Dr. Lee used his talents for the glory of God.

Someday each of us must stand before the Lord and give an account of our management. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." God knows our gifts, abilities and talents. Those who squander them will be very sorry. As they stand to give their account to God, they will feel worse than a man who is losing his job—much worse. On the other hand, those who use worldly wealth wisely will be rewarded. Jesus says they will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. They will receive eternal life in God's kingdom with their eternal friends.

Jim Elliot was an American missionary to Ecuador. In 1956 he visited the Auca Indians, known to be cruel to outsiders. He was martyred immediately, together with four other men missionaries. He was 28 years old. His wife Elisabeth visited the very men who had martyred her husband and began to witness Christ's love to them. Eventually, many in the tribe became Christians. They are forever indebted to Missionary Elliot, who gave his life for their salvation. His motto was, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

In a faraway place in India, there lived a village people who were known as headhunters. Nearly 100 years ago, American Baptist missionaries went there, sacrificing their careers and time and even their lives to preach the gospel to them. Finally, the chief of the tribe believed in Jesus. Then the whole tribe was converted. They stopped being headhunters and became worshipers of the one true God. Now they are so grateful to American missionaries. When Pastor Lincoln visited them, they expressed their deep gratitude to America for sending missionaries to them. When American missionaries went out to many nations with the gospel, America had many friends all over the world. But these days, many people are overweight. It happened because shrewd businessmen did not have basic ethical concern for the national welfare. For example, McDonalds created the super size meal and Hollywood created an atmosphere of "tolerance" by enlisting all kinds of heavy people to be television stars. Now these heavy Americans are sending high tech weapons against a poor nation Iraq. It is too shameful to think about. We must repent our laziness and selfishness and work hard to send missionaries to many nations once again.

We only thank God for the beautiful Korean missionaries who have gone to many nations to share the gospel with young people. Dr. Lee strongly encouraged all of them to be wise managers to advance God's kingdom. In Paraguay, there is Missionary John Lee. To establish his missionary life, he had to be a wise manager. After ten years of struggle, God established a fruitful ministry through him that is self-supporting and a blessing to the people. He owns a beautiful farm on which he raises milk cows and other animals, even alligators. One part of it is set aside as a worship service place and a conference ground. Through his one-to-one Bible study ministry and Sunday worship service Paraguayan students are coming to Jesus and becoming his disciples.

The best example of using worldly wealth to gain spiritual friends is our Lord Jesus Christ. In order to come into this world, he gave up his power and glory in the kingdom of God. He lived a pure and poor life. He seemed to have no money. Yet he lived a giving life. He used his time for God and for others. He spent much time in prayer. He gave his heart to the sick and needy. Finally, he became the Lamb of God who shed his blood for the sin of the world. He could have saved himself. But he used his body and blood for us. He did this to win us over to God and take us back to his kingdom. He earnestly desires to welcome us into spiritual friendship with him in heaven forever. What a friend we have in Jesus!

Jesus said, "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." When we accept this truth, it compels us to become wise managers for the work of God. But we cannot suddenly become wise managers for the whole world. Look at verse 10. "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." Being a wise manager starts with small things. We must show ourselves trustworthy with small things. Then God will trust us with bigger things. For example, when we take care of one sheep with all our hearts, God will give us another sheep. But if we despise one sheep....

Ultimately, being a wise manager is a matter of heart. Look at verse 13. "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." We have only one heart. With our one heart we can serve one master, not two. When we give our hearts to God, we can be wise managers. King David was a mere shepherd boy. But he loved God from his heart. He was faithful to take care of his father's sheep when no one was looking. If one of the sheep was attacked by a lion or a bear, David fought to save it, risking his life. God saw his love for God and his faithfulness. God chose him to be the shepherd of his people Israel. God gave him wisdom and strength until he could conquer all their enemies and

establish the united Kingdom of Israel. David is known as a man after God's own heart. Wise managers obey Deuteronomy 6:5: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

1 Corinthians 4:2 says, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." We have been given a trust by God. We have abundant worldly wealth that can be used for God's purpose. We have a rich spiritual legacy through Dr. Lee and Mother Barry. Therefore, we must give our hearts to God. We must use our time and resources to carry out one-to-one Bible study with students. We must pray that God may make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This is not really a group effort. Each of us as individual persons must someday stand before Jesus and give an account.

Third, Jesus rebukes the unfaithful Pharisees (14-18).

When the Pharisees heard Jesus' teaching, they sneered. They thought it was ridiculous that Jesus was teaching his rag-tag disciples to be wise managers of God's work. They could not understand Jesus' teaching because they did not love God from their hearts; they loved money. Jesus rebuked them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight" (15).

Jesus continued in verses 16-18. "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." In brief, the Pharisees used man-made laws to justify their adulterous lifestyles and appear holy before the eyes of men. But they were dishonest and unfaithful in the sight of God. Jesus rebuked them plainly to help them repent.

In this passage we learn that Jesus wants each of us to be a wise manager. We must know how to make things work out. We must use worldly wealth to win spiritual friends for the kingdom of God. Above all, we must love God with all our hearts. May God raise each of us as a wise manager to advance the kingdom of God.