

# Managing Money with a **H**eavenly **P**erspective

Luke 16:1-15

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*"There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'"*

And the manager thinks to himself, "What shall I do? He's taking my livelihood away from me. How will I make it? How will I survive? I can't dig ditches. I'm not strong enough. I can't beg. I would be ashamed to do that and wouldn't be able to live with myself. What else can I do? I know. I've got a solution!" And instead of a job, he comes up with a *scheme*. An ingenious plan! Not an honest one, but an ingenious one.

"Since I still have access to my master's books, I'll call in each of the people who owe him money and renegotiate a new contract, cutting their bill way down, even in half. Why, they'll be so pleased with me, I'll get on their good side, and they'll be glad to do me a favor and take me in, maybe for a long time, maybe until I can find another job. That way, I'll be okay." And so, that's what he does.

But hasn't he forgotten something? What's going to happen when his boss finds out what he did? He won't stand a chance! But instead of locking him up and throwing away the key, his master *commends* the dishonest manager for how smart he is in coming up with such a plan. Who would have ever thought up something like that! Amazing!

And what else is the master going to do? His borrowers are going around town telling everyone what an amazing guy he is; how generous he is. They've never seen anything like it before in their lives! Is he now going to *rescind* his offer and go back on his word? It would be like Ebenezer Scrooge taking back the "prize turkey" from the Christmas dinner!

*For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.* Shrewd. Cunning. Crafty. Able to make things go their way, even if it's dishonest. Whatever it takes to take care of number one. The ends justify the means. That's the way of the world. Even the master himself could appreciate this. What we see here is managing money from an earthly perspective. It's ours to use, putting it to use in ways that benefit us; that take care of us; that provide for us. It's a simple fact: in matters of their own generation, sons of this world, non-Christians, are decidedly shrewder than Christians. But of course, only for this generation; only for this world.

*And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.'*

When the manager loses his job, loses his means of survival, where does he turn? To his own cunning and craftiness. He uses the wealth that had been entrusted to him, in a scheming way in order to survive; in order to provide for himself. He uses it to buy favors; to buy friends who would then take care of him in this life. That's what the sons of this world do: manage wealth from an earthly perspective in order that it would provide all that they need for the here and now. Jesus gives us another perspective. A *heavenly* perspective on managing what we've been entrusted with. *And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.*

There's nothing inherently unrighteous about wealth. It's our *perspective* on it that makes it unrighteous. When we treat it like a god. When we look to *it* to be our savior; to provide for us; to take care of us. When we put our faith in money instead of in God it becomes unrighteous. And that is the normal state of affairs in our world. It's the natural perspective we're all born with.

Luther put it this way in his Large Catechism: "Many a person thinks he has God and everything he needs when he has money and property; in them he trusts and of them he boasts so stubbornly and securely that he cares for no one. Surely such a man also has a god- Mammon by name, that is, money and possessions – on which he fixes his whole *heart*. It is the most common idol on earth. He who has money and property feels secure, happy, fearless, as if he were sitting in the midst of paradise. On the other hand, he who has nothing, doubts and despairs as if he

never heard of God. Very few there are who are cheerful, who do not fret and complain, if they do not have mammon. This desire for wealth clings and cleaves to our nature all the way to the grave."

It's the parable of the rich fool earlier in Luke chapter 12. *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

*And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."*

*And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?"*

*Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.*

*"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

*For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. Of course they are. How else are they going to make it? Without faith that God's taking care of them, what else are they going to do? Who else is there to take care of them? They have to take matters into their own hands; put their faith in themselves, and use whatever wealthy they can get their hands on, to take care of themselves; to look out for themselves.*

*For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. Managing wealth from an earthly perspective. Christians, followers of Christ, sons and daughters of light, don't need to resort to this type of shrewdness, for they have faith, not in earthly wealth, but in their Heavenly Father to take care of them.*

Notice the parallels, but also the one great difference. This manager is not an owner, but a steward of what belongs to another. So are we. He's entrusted with property and values. So are we. These are the unrighteous mammon. In our case too. He makes friends with it. So do we. He comes to an end. So do we.

But where are we going? When wealth fails us, when the end comes, and we can't take it with us, what does the unbeliever have? Nothing. He no longer has a home. How's he going to survive eternally? His money can't help him now. His friends can't help him now. His craftiness and cunning and shrewdness are of no use. The sons of unrighteousness, the sons of this world have no hope for eternity. The sons of light, the sons of righteousness, are looking forward to their eternal dwelling; their eternal home.

Jesus continues, *"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. Behind the use of the earthly wealth God has entrusted to us to be good stewards of, is the estimate of wealth. How important is it to us? What value do we put on it? To the sons of this eon, this world, non-Christians, money has great value. It's often at the top of the list! People will often do anything for money. Sell themselves out to unrighteousness. Do whatever it takes to get money. It's their god. What else do they have?"*

But to the sons of light, to Christians, money is a very little thing; especially compared to what really matters, compared to eternal things, compared to following God. For Christians, money is pretty low on the list. A very little thing. Their faith is elsewhere. They look elsewhere. They have a different savior. A different care-taker.

*"One who is faithful in a very little" in the use of a very little thing, like money, like earthly wealth, "is also faithful in much", in more important matters; in eternal matters. "... and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.*

We are all stewards, not owners. All that we have, belongs to Another, to whom we must give an accounting. If it were ours, we might more easily think that we were free to do with it as we please. Therefore, Jesus asks very fittingly: "If we are not faithful in what is "another's, for which we are accountable, who will give us "what is our own"? Matthew 25, the Parable of the talents: *"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"*

Behind the *use* of the earthly wealth we've been entrusted with to be good stewards of, and of the *estimate* we place on it, the value to us, is the *resistance* we must offer to its deceptive power. *No servant can serve two masters, for 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 God and money."*

Earthly wealth not only tends to unrighteousness in its use, and leads us to place a false estimate upon it, it would also make us its servant. And at the same time, leads us to think that we can *also* serve God. Thus, the resistance needed by every disciple against both being *enslaved* and being *deceived* by money.

The underlying thought is that none of us is our own master. We're all servants. Our hearts, our wills, our lives, are governed by another. The only question is who this will be. ... *for 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 God and money."* In other words, in his very heart and by his very thoughts he will make one of the two his *real* master, give him *heart* service, and will make the other his *sham* master, give him only *outward* service. Only *One* can really be master and lord in our hearts. (Lenski)

*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

Money, or worldly wealth, is the root of all evil, when what? When we love it *more* than God. *For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.* (1 Timothy 6:7-10)

The reality is that our hearts are often divided. We indeed try to serve two masters. God knows what's going on with us. He knows our loves. He knows what we trust in. And what we often exalt and hold so high, He considers detestable, putting us in roughly the same position as that manager in the parable who is asked to turn in the books. Imagine a heavenly audit of the books of your life. A close examination at how you handled the wealth, the money, God entrusted to you, and what you did with it. Whom do you serve – God or money?

Jesus was tempted by mammon; wealth. The devil dangled all the riches and glories of this world in front of Jesus for one moment of faithlessness, one bit of worship. *"All these are yours, if you bow down and worship me."* Jesus resisted. *"You will worship the Lord your God, and Him alone will you serve,"* He said.

Where we love wealth, Jesus loved God. Where we pursue comfort, He went to the cross. Where we look for profit and gain, Jesus took loss. Where we are faithless in little, He is faithful in much. Where we exalt power and wealth and fame, He exalts righteousness and faithfulness and love.

In the end, and there is a coming end, when the wealth of this world fails; when the idol of money is finally exposed as the worthless fraud that it is; when you have lost everything - including your own life; there at that end, is only Jesus - who will not fail you, welcoming you into an eternal dwelling that He won for you by substituting His life for yours.

In Christ, you have the riches of heaven laid up in trust for you. In Christ, you have an eternal dwelling that awaits you. In Christ, you hold citizenship in a country that will never fall. His life, is yours. His faithfulness, is yours. His kingdom, is yours. You literally have nothing to lose. And having nothing to lose, being dead to this world and dead to self, turns out to be the freest position there is. Free to use what you've been given, entrusted with – to love, as you have been loved. Managing wealth with a heavenly perspective. To serve, as you have been served. (William Cwirla)