

The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 August 2020

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Well, here we are again, and I'm going to be talking about money some more, because that is what today's passage is all about. Now, not only is it uncomfortable for me to talk about money and for you to hear about money, it's also a very difficult passage. It's one of the most notoriously difficult parables in the New Testament. And so let's pray for God to help us as we tackle this parable together. Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you speak about everything we need to hear, and you speak about very practical things. And we also thank you that while they are easy to understand parts of your word, they're also difficult parts that we must tackle and that they have real important lessons for us. And so we pray that you would help us to understand, Lord Jesus, what you are saying in this parable, why you gave it to your disciples and what it means for us today. So please be with us and help us in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, I want to start by asking you this morning, how good are you with money? How good are you at making money work for you? How good are you at saving up for the future? Boys and girls, if you have, if there's an expensive toy or game that you really, really want, but you can't afford, how good are you, how patient are you at saving up money and not using it until you can afford that thing? Or do you tend to just get tired of saving and use your money on other things? Well, it's a question that this parable asks us this morning. Jesus is asking his people in this parable and in its teaching and its application, how good are you guys and girls with using money that God has given you? That's really what this is about because it's, it's a story about a guy in, in turn to Luke 16. We'll have a look at it now. It's a story about a guy, a manager of money who uses it very cleverly for his own future, who makes it work for him. And it turns out Jesus is saying, well, do you make money work for you? And especially if you're God's people, do you make it work for the kingdom? That's what the story is about.

But as I said earlier, it's a notoriously difficult parable because the guy Jesus is saying we should be like, he's definitely not the most admirable character. I mean, look what happens. He's a manager. He gets fired for bad management of someone else's money. But then just before he leaves his work, he knows he's on his way out. He's got his notice or whatever, like one month, one week's notice, however long he got. But there was a time that he was, he knew he was being fired, but he was still in his job. And he used his position that he still had before he left to make friends for himself after he was fired. And the rule, the way he did it is that he called some of the debtors, people who owed his master money. And there was a lot of money, a hundred measures of olive oil, a hundred measures of wheat. Now these measures were told by the commentators were very large amounts. This is a lot of money. And he reduces those debts. He gives one guy a 50% discount, another guy a 20% discount. And those are large amounts of money. And those are still legally binding while he's manager. And so these guys will owe him one. So by the time he's fired, he can go to them and he's set up for the rest of his future. That's what this parable is about. But he's, it's quite dishonest and it's quite deceptive. And so the real first difficulty of this parable is why is Jesus telling us to be like, let's be honest, a criminal? I mean, that's why you don't find this parable in many children's Bibles because you don't want to tell children, well, you know, here's a very clever cunning criminal go and be like him because that's not really what Jesus is saying. All right. Parables like this, not every point of them are something we must model ourselves after. We must follow the example of Jesus is drawing out one point of the story and he tells us what it is later. He is not commending this guy's dishonesty and he's not saying we must be like him in that way. But what he is drawing out is this guy's shrewdness and his planning for the future with the resources he had in the present. That's the point. And the fact that he uses this rather seedy character is classic Jesus because he's, he's using a shocking image and saying, you know what?

I want you to be a bit like that. I want you to use the resources you have now cleverly for your future.

And it's a, it's a, how much more argument, right? Uh, so we've come across these, these kind of ideas before in the parables with the unjust judge. Remember that parable? Uh, Jesus told of a, of a judge who was really, he was, he wasn't just and he wasn't merciful. He was a horrible guy. And yet he still gave justice to the woman who bothered him about it over and over again. And that was how much more argument Jesus is saying, how much more would God who is not like him give justice to his people?

[5 : 46] And so in the same way, Jesus is saying, if earthly minded people use money cleverly to invest in their future, how much more should people of the kingdom use their present resources to set up the future and to invest wisely and cleverly in the future rather than just throwing them away and thinking that they're things of this earth. And so they don't matter. And that that's really the point Jesus is making here. Are you shrewd and clever in how you use what you currently have in light of the future that's coming? And it's also a bit of a rebuke. Jesus is, is saying, you know, people of the earth, people of the world, people who are just living for this world, actually much better at using the resources and the money they have than you guys are. Look what he says in verse eight, for the children of this age are more shrewd than the children of light in dealing with their own people. And so take a, take a leaf out of their book. It's interesting as well. There's a bit of a shocker in this parable when the master finds out that his steward has cheated him out of, out of this wealth. He doesn't criticize him. He commends him. Look at verse eight, the master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly. And so both the master and the manager are just people of this world. But the master recognizes that the manager acted in a worldly way and being worldly himself, he respected that. He's saying, well played, I've got to take my hat off to you.

Jesus is saying, you know, these guys know how to use money. And it's true, isn't it? Worldly people only living for this world do know how to use money. Well, they do know how to make it work for them. If you look at the top 20 richest people of the world, I doubt you'd find many heavenly minded people. Most of them are not Christians. Most of them are this worldly people, people of this age rather than people of the age to come. But the point of this is Jesus saying, yes, they use money much better than you do, probably because they don't have the ethical constraints that Christians do.

But that doesn't mean you shouldn't use it as best you can as well. And this is for three reasons. There's three truths that come out of this parable that teach us why and how we can use money well in light of where we're going. So let's look at each of those. The first one, the first principle, the first truth that Jesus draws out of this parable is that your money is not yours, no matter how much you have or how little you have, whatever you have, it's not actually yours, it doesn't belong to you.

So this parable introduces to us the idea of stewardship, that word management or stewardship, the original word actually appears over and over again in this parable. And then when Jesus applies it, applies the parable, he explicitly draws out this idea of using things that are not your own.

look at verse 12. And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you what is your own? And so Jesus wants to remind his disciples, whatever they have now in this age on this earth is not actually their own. They don't own it. It's not totally theirs.

[9 : 19] They are stewarding it. They are managing it. They have been given a responsibility to use it for a particular purpose. Boys and girls, if your parents send you to the shop with 20 rand to buy some milk and you came back home with 20 rands worth of sweets and no milk and half of those sweets eaten on the way back, how would your parents feel? What would they say? They wouldn't be too impressed with you, right? And they probably wouldn't give you more money in the future to steward and to do things with because you didn't use the little they did give you. And so that's what Jesus is saying here. He is assuming that what you have has been given to you by God. And it's true. We think what we have, we've earned, you know, the paycheck we get at the end of the month, the pocket money that you get at the end of the month, you think you've earned it and therefore you can do whatever you want with it.

Jesus is saying, well, no, actually God gave it to you. It's God. It's God that owns everything anyway. But even the abilities that he gave you to earn it, to earn your paycheck at the end of the month are from him. And so actually all that money is from him. All of that money is actually him who, which he's redirected with sovereign control over your circumstances and over your abilities.

He's redirected to you to steward. And if you think about it, if you, if you are a wealthy person, if you have a lot of money, just think about all the other people in the world who have as much education as you, who possibly work harder than you and don't have that much money.

Why? Well, it's because you had opportunities that they didn't have, which has got really nothing to do with you. It's got everything to do with God's sovereignty and him putting you in positions that he didn't put them, which means that the wealth you have is not yours. The wealth I have, not that I have wealth. I'm a pastor. The little bit that I have is not mine. I can't just decide what to do with it because I think I earned it. Actually, God gave it to me. And so I've got to be careful in how I use it. And then the second truth that we see in this parable is that your money will not last. It's temporary. Not only is it not yours, but you only have it for a limited period of time.

So the manager in this parable, he did what he did because he realized that his access to his master's money was very limited for a particular time. And so he wanted to make best use of it before he lost access to it. And Jesus is saying the same about our money, whatever we have, whatever resources we have in this life, they're not going to last. They're temporary. Look at verse nine. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of worldly wealth so that when it fails, not if it fails, when it fails, they may welcome you into eternal dwellings. And so Jesus is reminding us, whatever you have now, whatever resources you have access to, whatever you've saved for yourself and accumulated, you only have for a set time in this age. And so use it before it becomes useless and it will become useless. You'll know this concept if you were in Zimbabwe in 2007.

[12 : 50] In 2007, Zimbabwe suffered a huge hyperinflation because of the economic instability. Prices just shot up and money on an hourly basis became more and more worthless. And so there was something like 79 billion percent inflation at one point. And a loaf of bread cost 550 million Zimbabwe at one point. And the government were actually printing 100 trillion dollar notes, which became even even that astronomical amount became worthless within hours of printing it. And prices were changing half hourly every 15 minutes. And so what people did is they made sure they used their money before it became worthless. And it was becoming worthless very quickly. People were spending it while they still could. And Jesus here is saying, we've got to see our lives on earth as one of two ages. There are two ages the Bible talks about, the present age and the coming age. And what he says is that whatever wealth and stuff that you have in the present age, it's going to suffer a drastic devaluation in the age to come when Jesus comes back. All of that fancy, shiny wealth that people spend their lives chasing after now, it's going to be as valuable as Zimbabwe were in 2007 when the age to come arrived. And so don't sit on it.

Use it now while you still can. And so your money is not yours. Your money will not last. But that doesn't mean it's not important in God's economy in this age. And that's really the main point that Jesus wants to draw out of this parable. That how you use your money in this age, even though it's temporary and even though it's stewarded money, how you use it will have real effects in the coming age. Because right now, yes, it will be valueless in the coming age, but it is valuable now and it can do things. And it can make a difference not only for this life, but more importantly, for the life to come. That is the point. Just like the manager that was shrewd by knowing that how he used his money now would affect his future, Jesus is saying, you must be shrewd in knowing how you use money today will affect your eternal future and the eternal future of others. That's why he says in verse 9, and I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of worldly wealth. By means of worldly wealth. Use worldly wealth. It actually makes a difference.

Worldly wealth is not something that should be ignored. It's going to have eternal effects. It's going to make friends for you to welcome you into eternal dwellings. And so make friends for yourself with this worldly wealth. Now, what does he mean? What does it mean to make friends who will welcome you into eternal dwellings? Well, it means use your money now in a way that will have effects for others in eternity. Use your money now in a way that people in eternity will recognize helped them either to get there or help them to live this life on the way there.

Use your money now in a way that will have effects for others in eternity. And there's a few ways you can do that. Investing in gospel ministry is an obvious way because the gospel of Jesus Christ dying on the cross and rising again, dying for sins and rising as the Lord of this earth, that gospel message must be proclaimed. Otherwise, people will not be saved. People are saved through hearing and trusting in Jesus. And so investing in gospel ministry is a direct investment in the age to come and in people's salvation. And so that is one way to make friends who will welcome you into eternal dwellings. Some of those people who will welcome you will be there because of work that was enabled by your giving. And it will mean something. You can use money now, which will mean something, which will have a real effect in the world to come. But also giving charitably to people in need, especially Christians who will be in the new creation because they will not forget that. Whatever you do now for people who will be there, they will not forget. You will be honored for that. God will be honored for that, but you will be recognized and you will have the privilege of knowing that you've been used by God to help those people while you still can. And so do that. See your money, whatever you have now, see it as something which gives you the opportunity to make a difference for eternity. That's what Jesus is really trying to get at here. And in that, we've got to recognize that money is a legitimate means that God uses to do his work in the world. We've got to recognize that just as much as prayer and evangelism, money and how we spend money is a way that God does his work. And so don't under spiritualize money because that gives us an excuse to squander it on what we want. Let me explain what I mean. You know, we see things like evangelism and Christian ministry and getting involved in word ministry and Bible studies and praying.

We see those as very spiritual things and they do have spiritual effects and they do, you know, God uses those things as means to actually achieve his purposes and they do have eternal effects. When we pray, that has effects. When we share the gospel, that has effects. But in the same way, when we spend money wisely for God's work, that has eternal effects. And we mustn't think that it's any less spiritual than prayer or evangelism is. Because if we do, if we think those things are spiritual, but the money, that's just earthly and it's just tainted by the earth. What we do is we think, well, we can just use it how we want it.

[19 : 29] And so under spiritualizing money, thinking that that doesn't play a role in God's economy, our sins and sins, gives us an excuse to squander it. But that actually is hijacking ourselves and it's hijacking our own opportunity to make a real difference in eternity with what we have. So don't under spiritualize money, especially because, now take note of this, God will reward you for how you use it on earth. The Bible does teach that there will be differing rewards in the age to come and they will largely be based on how you stewarded whatever God gave you in this world, both for the rich and the poor. Whatever it is, whether it's a lot or a little, how you used it will determine what God entrusts you with in the new creation. We read this over and over again in the parable of the talents, for example, in Matthew 25. And Jesus talks about a master. It's obviously talking about himself, the Messiah, who goes away for a time and he's going to come back. And in the time he's gone, he gives his servants different amounts of things to manage. And then he comes back and he holds them to account for how well they've used those things. And he says in Matthew 25, 21 to one of the servants, good and faithful servant, well done. You were faithful over a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. And so in there, we see this concept that however we've used what God has given us with these few things on earth, that will determine what he gives us in the age to come.

Now, Paul talks about this explicitly in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. And he says this, each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. And then he goes on and talks about Christians who use what God has given them, the opportunities and the resources differently.

And it's quite sobering reading. He says this, the fire will test the quality of each one's work. If anyone's work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burnt up, he will experience loss, but he himself will be saved. And so he's talking about two different Christians here. One who uses the opportunities and resources they had to do things that last for eternity and one that didn't. And you don't want to be one of those who didn't. You don't want to be one of those who gets to the age to come and looks back on this age and goes, you know what? I actually wasted that. I squandered it because you don't have another chance. Don't be one of those people.

And we see that that will affect your eternal rewards, depending on what you did with what you had in this life. And it's not only for the rich. I said it before, but I say it again. Jesus says it in verse 10 of this passage, whoever is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much. And so whatever you've been given, ask yourself whether you're using it in ways that have eternal effects, because that will affect your eternal rewards. Two Corinthians nine verse six says, the person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. And the person who sows generously will also reap generously. And so to tie together all of these ideas to summarize what Jesus is saying in this parable, he is saying to his people, guys, it's in your best interest to cleverly use whatever access to money you have now for eternal effects. And so consider how you use money.

Consider how you spend, consider what you spend on your car, what you spend on your house, what you spend on your hobbies and ask, is that in any way comparable to what you spend on God's work?

[23 : 44] I know that's a very uncomfortable question, but it's an important question because if you're not spending on God's work, you are robbing yourself of rewards in the age to come and you're going to regret that and you're robbing yourself of opportunities to affect people's lives in the age to come and you will look back and regret that. And so take a lesson from the shrewd manager in this parable and learn to spend now on things that will set you and others up for eternity.

Now, that doesn't mean you can't save for this life and for your future in this world and for your children's future in this world. That doesn't mean you can't have an insurance policy or a retirement annuity or put money towards an education fund. Those are wise things to do. And so Jesus is not saying here that you can't save for your future on earth, but what he is saying, it's more important to save for your future in eternity with whatever excess you might have. Don't squander it. You will regret it if you do. And you do that by being shrewd. Okay. Not just by throwing money away into a black box out of duty to give towards God's work. You do it shrewdly. You do it with thinking. You don't throw money away to anything that calls itself Christian. You actually think of how to use your money and invest just like you would invest, just like people of the world invest without, you know, they don't throw their money away in stupid investments. They analyze the effect of the investments to make sure that they're going to get the best out of it and reap the most rewards.

We've got to do that with our money and resources on earth. We've got to plow them into things that we know will reap the best eternal reward. We've got to invest carefully in effective gospel work where the gospel is being faithfully proclaimed, where people's lives are actually being changed and where people are being saved. Because if you do that, if you have that eternal perspective on your money, on your mammon, that's the word basically that Jesus uses to talk about money, mammon. It's not just your bank account, but it's your stuff, whatever you have in this earth. And if you look at it and use it every day with an eternal perspective, then you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings by people whose lives were affected by how you used your stuff on earth. And so you will be able to enjoy the rewards that God is preparing for those who have been faithful for what he gave them. Let's pray and ask for his help to do that. Lord, we do thank you for this passage. Even though it's difficult to get our teeth into, it's convicting because money is something we like to want to control and we don't like to relinquish control over our money. Thank you for this very clear warning that if we don't use our money well for the age to come, we will regret it. And so I pray, Lord, that you would help us, all of us, no matter how much or little money we have, to see it as opportunity to invest, in the lives of others for the age to come and to see it as opportunity to invest in rewards in the age to come. Lord, help us to not try to over-spiritualize things so that we don't see money as important.

Thank you for reminding us that it is important in your economy and that you want us to use it wisely, shrewdly. Help us to do that in the months and years to come so that you will use us and use our resources to grow your kingdom, to save people, and to glorify your name. Amen.

for additional disturbances. Good morning, sir. Actually, the next component is also about a we did for delivery of easy-to-workout assist to telling you.

[27 : 44] Please send your kids and help us into our business and and then over the last bids or effects. We made our job from Do notamment To Date and we created our bid for declaring a gain of ■■■■■■■■ to pay ourselves over the country and imagine what you may need. So thank you.

Everything everybody made a Pa beginning as soon as possible, it was out for a while toot, we go and see what we'll have a great staff and you can see what this decision in front of us can increase us.