

The Shrewd Manager

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[0 : 00] So we're going to look back to the parable of the shrewd or the dishonest manager, which causes some people some concern, which we will hopefully look at and hopefully see what God is saying.

If you haven't been with us over this period when we've been looking at the parables, we've explained the parables, or we've done a little bit of explanation behind the parables, because I think sometimes we think the parables are just simply illustrations, that Jesus, like any good preacher, has good illustrations and uses parables.

But we know that that's not simply the case when we look at Luke 8, 9 and 10. We saw that Jesus, there in fact, we'll look back at that, Luke 8 and verse 9 and 10, Jesus says, and when His disciples asked Him what this parable meant, He said, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand.

And so it wasn't really just a parable, it was an illustration to make truth simpler. It was actually that it wasn't a moralistic tale.

The parables were given so that when He told them, people would ask questions if they were searching spiritually, that they would ask questions what was the meaning behind the parables, and Jesus would tell them.

[1 : 29] In other words, telling the parables revealed something about the hearers who listened to them. If they just went, wow, that's a nice story, and walked away, then there was this recognition that they didn't really want to learn from Jesus what He had to say.

But the disciples would come and say, what do they mean? What does this parable mean? And Jesus would explain. And we've seen that they're never moralistic tales.

In other words, they're never just telling us how to act outwardly, although they do talk about that. But rather, they are wanting us to dig deeper, to find out about our spiritual motive, about our gospel understanding, about whether we understand grace, and what it means to live by grace.

And that's what we'll remember as we look at this parable. Because on the surface, it's a difficult parable. If you've read through it and been thinking, then you'll think, this is a difficult parable.

So because what we've got is we've got a rich man, and we're going to call him the owner, okay, whose manager, and we'll call him the boss, okay, his manager is being wasteful with the owner's money, and the owner has realized that that's the case.

[2 : 49] So he's going to do an account check. He's going to check on how this manager, this boss is being dishonest or cheating.

And so the boss realizes that he's going to be found out because he has been cheating. And so what he decides to do is he thinks quickly, and he goes to all the creditors, all the people that owe money to the owner, and he says, look, how much do you owe?

Right, cut it in half, give me that, and the deal's done. And he did that with several people in order to get at least some of the money back, and also to make friends in case he got the sack.

So he could go to these people and say, hey, wasn't I good to you guys, and you'll be good to me in return. He makes the deals, in other words, in order to be popular.

Interestingly, as the parable unfolds, and the owner finds out about this, the owner congratulates him. Good job.

[3 : 55] Well done, boss man, because that's exactly what I would have done. I would have done the same. You've been shrewd, you've been sharp, you've showed foresight, and you've showed urgency.

And he commends the guy for doing that. Now, we don't know what happened, and they then go on and sack him. That probably would be difficult in the context of the parable.

We're not told. But if you've been reading this carefully, then you'll have asked the question, because I asked the question, I'm sure we've all asked the question.

Firstly, is Jesus commending dishonesty? In verse 8. The parable were told, the master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.

So is Jesus commending dishonesty? And then secondly, even more worryingly, is Jesus saying that we can buy our way to heaven.

[4 : 54] In verse 9. The master commended, sorry, and he goes on, 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.

That has caused people a great deal of difficulty. That verse. I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, you may receive, they may receive you into eternal dwellings.

It's Jesus saying we can buy our way into heaven by using the wealth that we have. Well, let's take a closer look at this parable for a few moments this morning.

The first thing that we need to notice is that the parable is about contrasts. It's not about similarities. What do I mean by that? Usually the parables are taking a situation and saying, the kingdom of God is like this.

This is what it's like in the kingdom, and it is almost an illustration, but with a deeper message. But this parable is not about similarities between the behavior of the people in the story and Christians.

[6 : 03] It's about contrasts and how different they should be, not how much the same they should be. Jesus says that in verse 8, the second half of verse 8, He says, for the sons of the world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

So He's talking about the sons of the world. People are not believers and people who are Christians. And He's saying one group are working in a certain way, and they're working by their own principles, and sometimes Christians don't work by the principles they should work by.

So basically what the parable is saying is saying the boss and the owner are making decisions playing by the rules and the principles that they live by.

Okay? The boss is playing by the rules that he lives by. What rule does he live by? Looking after number one. That's the most important thing for the boss and indeed the owner.

That's the principle of their life, looking after number one. The boss probably recognizes the owner is already exploiting his creditors.

[7 : 20] He's probably already taking too much off them. And so he knows if he makes a deal where they're going to lose, where the owner's going to lose some money, that the owner will not kick up a fuss and expose him because he's already cheating because he looks after number one.

And so the boss is looking after number one. Now this parable is given in the context of Jesus with Pharisees and religious leaders around him and tax collectors and sinners also in the audience.

And the tax collectors, we see that in the previous chapter, the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. They would have loved this story. It's a great story for a tax collector.

It really, it would have resonated with them very powerfully because that's exactly what they were like. And that's the kind of principles they lived by. They lived looking after number one so much so they didn't care.

They didn't care if everyone hated them because they were making lots of money exploiting the poor and working from the pockets of the Roman leaders. So this boss man, we're told in Versailles, acted shrewdly.

[8 : 31] And he was commended for acting shrewdly. Now we get the word diaphragm from the same root as this word that is the word for shrewd, fronos, diaphragm.

And that just means the kind of what protects or what helps us, our inner bodily functions to work from the inside out.

And so it really has the meaning of, shrewdly here, has the meaning of the inner motivations that prompt our outward actions, you know?

And so he acted shrewdly because his inner motivation was self-preservation and self-love and money, profit.

And if he has no God in his life, then it means that he will do anything he can to self-preserve and self-love and become wealthy.

[9 : 32] Even if it means exploiting other people. And you will do your best to be popular and you'll do your best to be accepted as long as you don't get a hard time, which is partly what he was doing here.

And so he was commended for being sharp and for acting according to his worldly principles. The owner has this kind of grudging admiration, you know?

That's my boy, that's what I would have done. And that's the way of the world, the world they were living in. Now that is to be contrasted with the way we are to live our lives with respect to money and with respect generally to how we deal with people.

Self-preservation is not our motive. Love for money is not our motive. It may be the motive of other people, but it's not the motive of Christians. So Jesus here is speaking about love of money, but beyond that to our motives for doing what we do.

So what the, because it's a contrasting, not a similarity parable, what does it look like? Well the key to this parable is what Jesus says about the heart.

[10 : 50] That's the key. In fact, it's the key for all the parables, it's what Jesus is trying to expose is the motivation of our heart. Just as the boss and the owner had their self-preserving motive for what they did, the Christian has a motive too.

And we need to always seek and look for that in the parable. And there's two key verses that explain what Jesus is getting at. Verse 13, where he's speaking in almost unpacking the parable, he says, no servant can serve two masters for either he will hate one and love the other, or will be devoted to one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and money. Okay? So that's the first key verse. He's talking about the motivation of our heart, what moves us to serve in this world, the motivation of the heart.

And then in verse 15, God says, Jesus says, He said to them, you are those who justify yourselves speaking to the Pharisees because they loved money before men.

But God knows your hearts for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. God knows your hearts. So these are the key verses because they tell us what the parable is about.

[12 : 05] They tell us that Jesus is interested in exposing the hearts of the Pharisees and others around them with regard to money.

It's about idolatry. He's exposing the fact, we've seen it often in the parables, that he exposes the religious leader's hearts, the self-righteous religious Bible believing as it were, hearts of those who thought they were better than Jesus and they didn't need to be saved.

They were self-righteous. And as Christians, we take from that that when we became Christians, we gave our hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that doesn't mean we give our hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ and then just tread water until Jesus comes to take us home. It means that He gives us new desires, new love, new worship, new obedience, and that constantly idols are being knocked down in our hearts.

We have a spiritual relationship that changes what we think, yeah, even about money, what we think about everything.

[13 : 14] God knows your hearts, He says. Christ could see in this parable that the Pharisees were trying to justify themselves. They were sneering at Jesus because He had time for the tax collectors and the sinners.

They hated what He had to say about money and Jesus is exposing what they loved. He's exposing their hearts.

And as Christians, we need to recognize that meaning behind the parables, that He wants us to examine our hearts to see what our motive is for the way we live, for example, with regard to money.

We have a new worldview. We too are to be shrewd. You know what that means? What we said earlier, we're to be shrewd in that our outward action reflects our inner motivation and our inner motivation is grace.

It's the love of God who has transformed and renewed us by His saving work. And that is to be what motivates our life. So it's about the heart, okay?

[14 : 23] And in this parable, Christ commends three contrasts, three opposites to the behavior of the boss and the owner, particularly the boss.

And the contrast, remember, it's opposites. And He's talking about children of light and children of the world. And so He's not commending, inversely, He's not commending dishonesty.

That's what the owner was doing with the boss in their worldview, which was without God. But what He is doing, He's exposing that we should be the opposite of that.

The basic characteristic of the believer is driven by the beauty of Jesus Christ. And by the beauty of Jesus Christ in our hearts revealed in three ways, opposite to the three ways that the boss had acted.

So it's trustworthy, honest, and generous. So if we're looking at the deeper meaning of this parable, that's the deeper meaning of it.

[15 : 30] He's contrasting how the world acts with money and the motivation beyond money. And He's saying, we should not be like the boss.

We shouldn't be dishonest. We shouldn't be untrustworthy. And we shouldn't be mean. And these are three very beautiful, important, significant characteristics that you will take and I will take and walk out of here and live this week.

If Christ is the motive, if grace and Christ is the motivation of our lives. Not that we have plugged into the gospel and were saved and we can skip about and live any way we like, but that grace transform us so that we are the opposite of this behavior in the parable.

So the boss wasn't trustworthy and the owner recognized that. Couldn't be trusted. And probably the owner couldn't be trusted.

They couldn't trust each other. They were just probably fiddling each other in the books. But the Christian should be very different from that because our owner is trustworthy.

[16 : 37] Our boss is trustworthy. The Lord Jesus Christ. He says it as it is. He is completely honest and he is completely trustworthy. And if you're a Christian, you've laid your life at the fruit of the cross and said, Lord, you're worth it.

You're trustworthy. You are gracious. You're glorious. You're beautiful. Therefore so should I be. So if we go away from anything today, with anything today, take away these three things.

As a believer in Jesus Christ, I should be trustworthy, honest and generous. I should be trustworthy as a Christian. The Christians in this world should be the most trustworthy people on the planet.

You should be the most trustworthy person in your work, in your university, in your accommodation, in your home. People should look to you and say, I could leave anything with them because they are absolutely trustworthy, absolutely worth knowing and loving because of Jesus Christ in their lives and hearts, trustworthiness.

And the second thing is honesty, and it's kind of related, isn't it? We trust, we've laid our lives before Jesus Christ because He's been honest with us.

[17 : 54] He's told us who He is. He's told us why He's come. He's told us about our diseased, dead, lost hearts, and He said, but I've come to redeem you and I love you.

And grace is the most glorious thing. Therefore we too have entrusted our lives to this honest Savior and the beauty of that.

Now I think honesty is a vice in some circles. It may be a vice in your workplace, to be honest. It may be something that you shrug your shoulder with, I don't need to be honest.

As long as like the boss, I don't get found out. But is that how Jesus wants us to be as believers? Because first and foremost, we have to be honest with ourselves if we're going to come at Christ at all.

We have to be honest about our need and the darkness and the deception and the desperately wicked hearts that we have beyond understanding. You can understand them except God alone and then come to Him for grace and forgiveness and peace and hope.

[19 : 01] Honesty. So the Christians should be known in the workplace, in the home, wherever they are, wherever we are as being trustworthy and as being honest, full of integrity, people that other people can trust.

He speaks here about dishonesty and the word really is a spiritual word. It stems from unrighteousness. He talks about unrighteous wealth. Without justice, that is making money without recognizing God's parameters.

In other words, there's a spiritual dimension to even our dealing with money. Honesty, trust me. So the Christians should be trustworthy and honest. Two of the things that the boss and the owner weren't contrast.

And the third thing is generous. And this is implied more than spoken of here, but neither of these guys were really generous for the right reasons.

They wanted, they were preserving themselves really. Although the boss seemed to be generous to the others, it was really for his own benefit he was doing it. And yet the implied reality here is that the Christian is to be generous because God is generous.

[20 : 21] Verse 10 says, one who is faithful and a little is also faithful and much. One who is dishonest and very little is also dishonest and much. If then you've been faithful with the unrighteous, if you've not been faithful with the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust you to you true riches?

And that's hinting at the generosity of the living God. There's no greater generous act in the history of the universe or in spirituality or divinity than a savior nailed to a tree.

That is the deepest riches that there is in this universe. And that's God giving Himself for us. God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son.

God is a generous God. It's revealed in everything that we are. We sung about it in that amazing song about grace. And it's the opposite of what we are by nature, which is mean, tight-fisted and self-interested.

Not generous, not generous in anything that we are or do. So Christ commends three opposites in this parable. If you don't remember anything else, try and just burn them into your mind and heart.

[21 : 32] As a Christian, Jesus wants me to be trustworthy, honest and generous. I guarantee you'll have an opportunity to put that into practice tomorrow, somewhere.

Somewhere in your workplace, somewhere in your home, somewhere in your family. As you look at your bank account, maybe even. Trustworthy, honest, generous. And very briefly, can I just apply it in the same...there's three characteristics, and I'm going to apply it in three ways, because I think Jesus applies it in three ways in this parable.

The first is financially. He's simply talking about the way we deal with money, that we're to be trustworthy, honest and generous.

It's underlying here, but it's also spoken of throughout the New Testament. That financially, every day, you will deal with money today, probably, or certainly tomorrow.

The way you deal with it will reflect the motive of your heart. It will reflect what you love. It will reflect what comes first in your life, whether it's money or whether it's the Lord Jesus Christ.

[22 : 42] Every day, love for God as a Christian should be the foundation of your living, not love for money. That's what he says in this parable. That's what he says. We're to hold loosely to the pursuit of wealth.

It's hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. That's what he says, because he recognized those who love riches, who hold on to riches, have an idol. We all have idols. We all probably have money.

It's an idol to one degree or another, but we all have these things that God wants to root out. In all our dealings financially, he's saying, be trustworthy, be honest, and be generous.

Financially, but also generally in life, these characteristics should go beyond how we deal with money. In everything we do in life, we should, in the practical things of life and in the way we interact with one another, be trustworthy, honest, and generous.

Our whole characters inside the church and outside of the church should be marked by trustworthy, honest, generous dealings. Now, I know we're all unique.

[23 : 50] We're all different. God's given us all different characters, and none of us are going to be the same. But these fundamental pillars should be part of all of our lives.

So in St. Colombo, we should be a people who are known to be trustworthy with each other, generous with each other, and generous with each other in our lives, in the intentionality of our lives, because of what Jesus has done for us.

In other words, what Jesus is saying here is when you come to Christ, it changes the way you live. Now, we see that very clearly in the story of Zacchaeus, don't we?

When he became a Christian, when he came to Christ, it changed his attitude to the money that he'd been stealing of his brothers and sisters, and he repaid them. He didn't only repay them, he gave them more than they had before because he'd found true wealth.

He'd found the peace and love of God in Christ, and it changed his attitude practically to how he lived, trustworthy, honest, and generous.

[24 : 54] I was reading this week very briefly about a revival in Belfast in Northern Ireland in the 1920s. W. J. Nicholson was the preacher, and a huge amount of people came to Jesus Christ in Northern Ireland, Belfast, in some of the outlying areas at that time.

And Harland and Wolfe was a huge, big shipbuilders in Belfast at the time. I think I've told his story here before, but it's a lot of visitors, so they might not know it. Harland and Wolfe was one of the biggest shipbuilders in Europe at the time, and they had to build a special warehouse after the revivals to house all the tools that were brought back by employees who had stolen them before they became Christians.

Because Christ Jesus transformed the way they lived, and they wanted to be honest and reparative in their lives, and they wanted to give back.

Most were they honest and generous. When Jesus touches and changes our hearts, we live differently. We shouldn't be the same. All of us, even if we are naturally, we struggle with trust, and don't we all, but we trust Jesus.

Naturally, we all struggle with honesty, but we've come face to face with the honest one. And naturally, maybe we're a bit mean. And yet God transforms that and asks us to be different financially, generally, and to show these three characteristics also spiritually, spiritually in our lives.

[26 : 30] So that link between these three characteristics financially reveals our understanding of grace and really importantly, gospel usefulness.

So Jesus says, the way you deal with your wallet, the way you deal with your wallet, and what's in it, will be the way I judge whether you're useful in my kingdom or not.

And that's a hugely significant thing in verse 10 and 12. Jesus says, if you've been faithful in a very little, you'll also be faithful in much. If you're dishonest with a very little, you'll be dishonest in much.

If then you've not been faithful with the unrighteous wealth, that just means your day-to-day money that you get. Who will entrust you with true riches? Now that's a really solemnizing thought that our gospel usefulness is linked to whether money for us is an idol and whether we're willing to be trustworthy, honest, and generous with it.

And that's a link between our attitude to cash and the handling of cash and our attitude to the handling of God's riches that He's given us in grace.

[27 : 50] So the really challenging question for us today is, can God trust us to use the grace that He's given to us well? Really trust us to use that grace well.

Are we trustworthy through the Holy Spirit? Are we honest and are we generous? Or do we have an attitude that we say is that, I'm a Christian, I'm all right, Jack, I'm fine and there's a lot of benefit in it for me.

And we walk away from the ethical and moral responsibilities to be trust, ethical and moral, but they're actually really deeply spiritual and grace challenging.

Grace worthy, honest, and generous. So God's given us all. And St. Columbus here, and if you're visiting with us wherever you are, wherever you live, if you're a Christian, God has given each of us gospel responsibility.

We're partners in this kingdom. We're to be growing as individuals and as a church. We're to be fruitful, as I mentioned in that, talking about the parable. We're to see conversions for Jesus Christ in this gospel generation kingdom coming.

[28 : 56] And that requires us as believers to be trustworthy, honest and generous. Generous with our time, our gifts, our patience, our forgiveness.

Generous together as a congregation with how we treat one another in grace. Honest with one another in love so that we are able to share our failings and our faults as well as our blessings.

And trust worthy and pointing people to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we're to use our money for gospel investment, and that involves risk and involves action.

But we're to do it cheerfully and we're to do it lovingly. So it's not about buying our way to heaven. It's about using our gospel and material blessings to bless other people so that when we die and you'll not even take the clothes you're dressed in with you when you go, naked we came and naked we will return.

We'll take nothing with us. And He's saying that when all of that is gone, however much might be in the bank, you've lived your life investing in the people that you will share eternity with.

[30 : 11] That's really what He's saying in that verse in verse 9. So grace, the summary really is grace changes our hearts, therefore it changes our attitude to money in our hands.

Christ in our hearts, money in our hands. Christ is Lord of all. You can't love money first and God second as a Christian.

And you can't let money be the motivation for your life because it will drag you to the grave empty like a skeleton because it can't offer you life. Money can't offer happiness or life.

Jesus can. And if we can't be honest with God with regard to our attitude to money, don't be surprised if we're living in spiritual poverty.

Don't be surprised if we can't cope with the blessings and the conversions that He longs to give to us in Christ. Remember we can't take any of it with us.

[31 : 19] What we are investing, what are we investing in that is eternal value in your heart and in your life. These parables really expose our hearts. They're never moralistic.

They're never simply how to illustrations of life. They're always digging deep and if you're uncomfortable and I've been uncomfortable with that truth, it's only to point us to the grace and the riches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So amen.