

**Talk – Luke 16:1-18 – The 'Shrewd' Manager**

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**Talk Outline**

**My Mother rang...**

**Those who are listening**

**The Parable of the Shrewd Manager**

**A Lesson for the Pharisees**

**A Lesson for the Disciples**

**How do we respond?**

First

Second

Third

Finally

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CHECK TIME

**Talk**

**Prayer**

*Dear Lord and Father,*

*There are two groups of people addressed in the passage we are going to look at now – those who want to listen and those who don’t.*

*Father as we sit here today – help us to be people like those who want to listen. And Father, help us to do that with understanding. AMEN*

**My Mother rang...**

So, I picked up the phone and it was my mother.

- ‘I have been reading my Bible and I just read something that I think is wrong.’
- That is never a good way to open a conversation with a minister!
- My mother was reading Luke 16 – the *Parable of the Shrewd Manager*.
- ‘It seems to be suggesting that dishonesty is good’ ... ‘I was expecting the dishonest manager to be rebuked but instead he was praised’ .... ‘I think there must be a printing error’ ... ‘Can you tell me what the greek says’

It is not every day that my mother asks me a question about Greek!

- But she is not alone in asking – the parable we look at today has raised a few eyebrows.
- So, before we add *dishonesty* to our list of spiritual gifts – let’s see what the text is actually saying!
- The first half of Luke 16 is our passage.

**Those who are listening**

- Given that Luke set out to write an orderly account of what Jesus did and said – then some context may help.
- We find Jesus here on the road – heading to Jerusalem. There is an arrest, a false trial, and an execution waiting for him there.
- He has been teaching his disciples along the way, but the *crowds* are gathering. Chapter 15:1 tells us that the *‘tax collectors and ‘sinners’* were all gathering around

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to hear, but the *Pharisees* and the teachers of the law (who looked on) were taking issue.'

- Then at the beginning of Chapter 16 Jesus addresses *his disciples* – and guess who is still listening in - in verse 14 we find that the Pharisees have heard all that was said – and what they heard cause them to sneer at Jesus.
- So *disciples, crowds* and *Pharisees*. Understanding this setting is important for us if we want to understand this passage correctly.
- Jesus teaches in parables – which allows those who **want** to understand, the opportunity to hear the point of what he is saying - and those who **don't want** to understand, the opportunity to take issue with him.

### **The Parable of the Shrewd Manager**

- Let's look at the Parable of the Shrewd Manager.
- Luke 16 – verse 1.
- There was a rich man who had appointed a manager over his affairs – but that manager was doing a bad job.
- So, the manager is called in and sacked.
- Out on his ear and while clearing out his desk, he says to himself 'What shall I do now?' – I am not strong enough to do manual labour and my pride prevents me from begging.
- So, he comes up with a plan – he sets out to ensure – verse 4 – 'people will welcome him into their houses'
- The plan is simple. Use whatever trick you can to make friends with those who might be able to help you're out on his ear.
- He calls in his Masters debtors and one by one slashes their debt.
- The first, he reduces the loan from 800 gallons of olive oil to 400.
- The second, he reduces 1000 bushels of wheat to 800.
- And presumably on he went – gaining friends with those who he had once held to account.
- And here is where the surprise comes (and this is what my mother was seeking to understand). You would expect that the rich master would be furious.
- But in this parable. Jesus wants to draw out a different point.
- Verse 8 – 'the master **commends** the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly'.

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- I am sure there are some gymnastics that we can do to justify the dishonestly here.
- It has been suggested that it is possible that what the manager sliced off the bill was actually his commission – and so he did not take anything away from the masters rightful loan, all he did was reduce what he would not be able to claim anyway, given that he was now out of a job.
- Be that as it may – he was still called a *dishonest manager*.
  
- The point that Jesus makes:
- Verse 9 – ‘use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings’
- Both verses 4 and 9 – make the point that **what you do now – has an effect on what is to come.**
  - **what you do now – has an effect on what is to come.**
  
- The manager did *now* - something that ensured people would welcome him into their houses *then*.
- What Jesus is saying is - use what you have at your disposal *now* (your worldly comforts for example) to ensure that you gain friends and are welcomed eternally – that is *then*.

#### *Illustration*

- I am short sighted – have been since an early teenager.
- That means that I can see things close up, but I have trouble seeing things off in the distance (in fact if you are sitting past the middle of the church – I can't see you at all – sorry about that).
- Jesus is *not* commending a short-sighted dishonestly here – he is commending a long-sighted plan. One where what is done *now* has an effect on *then*.
- Jesus is saying - What we do in this life has significance – both for *now* and for *then*.

#### *Application*

- Friends, there is an uncomfortable reality that every person in this room needs to come to terms with.
- The reality - is that we all die!
  - My apologies if that comes across a little abrupt.
- And this reality can be experienced in one of two ways:
  
- Some will *live more for today* – enjoying whatever they can get – and when death comes will find that their lives bear testimony against them.

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- Others will look *more to the day to come* when they will enjoy the blessings of sitting with the people of God in the eternal heaven.
  
- Given our parable touches on the financial transactions of the shrewd manager – an area of our lives where the principal of ‘what we do today has an effect on what is to come’ could be applied to how **we** use what God has given us materially in the here and the now.
- The pursuit of material possessions is fairly relentless – not just in our world, but sadly also in the Christian Church.
- In Luke’s gospel, Jesus has quite a bit to say about wealth and riches, so this is not just an isolated topic that he wants to pick upon.
  - Chapter 6 (24) – Jesus says ‘Woe to you who are rich’
  - Chapter 12 (13-21) – Jesus offers the parable of the rich fool.
  - in our chapter – this parable of the shrewd manager is followed by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31).
  - in Chapter 18 (18-30) – Jesus offers the account of the rich ruler.
  - and then in chapter 19 we read about Zacchaeus who gives half of his wealth to the poor.
  
- As Jesus spends so much time teaching his disciples on this topic – then we would do well to pay some attention.
- But a friendly warning, What Jesus says will cause division. You can see that expressed by the two different groups who respond in Chapter 16.
- Parables do this. If you are *with* Jesus you see the positive imperative, if you are *against* Jesus you see the negative imperative.
- In speaking to the **disciples**, what Jesus says comes across as a positive imperative - use what you have now for God rather than for yourself.
- And in speaking to the **Pharisees**, what Jesus says comes across as a negative imperative – you are living more for yourself than you are for God – it is a rebuke – and so when they hear him (verse 14) they sneer.

#### **A Lesson for the Pharisees**

- So what is the lesson for the Pharisees?
- The Pharisees as the religious leaders of that day were trusted with much, but they blew it – they should have listened to the scriptures and taught the people so that they would be ready for the kingdom of God. They should have upheld the Law and the Prophets and through it pointed people to God.

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- But instead, they had been distracted by things of the world and tried to love both God and money.

Look at what Jesus says in verse 10 [Read Luke 16:10-15]

- Parables *commend* those who values what God values.
- But they also *condemn* those who don't value what God values.
- Let me show you the error of the Pharisees.
- They have compartmentalised their faith – and in the end lost sight of the main point.
- What I mean by that is that they have drawn a dividing line between the *secular* and the *spiritual*.
- One the one hand, they have pursued the secular things of the world – riches and comforts and status – and become lovers of money.
- They have effectively become career Pharisees rather than men of faith.
- That is the secular trap which the Pharisees have fallen into.
  
- Yet, one the other hand, when it suits, they have also been the spiritual ones – those who uphold the Law and the Prophets – who are seen in the temple – who lead the people in the ways of God's law.
- That is the spiritual role of the Pharisee.
  
- When someone of faith divides the secular and the spiritual – they become a hypocrite.
- I think that is what Jesus is challenging the Pharisees with in verses 16-18. [READ Luke 16:16-18]
  
- He is pointing out that the Pharisees uphold the Law and the Prophets – in fact they live the letter of the law – they are so concerned with living the letter of the law that it would be easier for heaven and earth to disappear before the least stroke of a pen could be dropped out of the law.
  
- But living the law does not mean they understand the law.
  
- Do you notice in Verse 16 that Jesus says that the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed *until* John. And that *since that time* of John, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached.
  
- The 'law and the prophets' is a way of saying that the Old Testament was proclaimed. That was the job of the Pharisees.

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- But Jesus suggests that it was proclaimed *until* John (that is John the Baptist) and from *that* time the good news of the kingdom of God was preached.
- Jesus is referring to himself. It is Jesus who ushers in the Kingdom of God. It is Jesus who brings to fulfilment the Law and the Prophets. And it is *to* Jesus that the crowds have been flocking.
  
- But while this is happening – despite the fact that the Law and the Prophets point to Jesus, the Pharisees have stuck to the law and failed to see Jesus.
- I am not sure what verse 18 is doing there – the quick comment from Jesus about divorce and adultery. I suspect it is him drawing from an issue that the Pharisees have ruled on (perhaps relating to King Herod’s divorce) which demonstrates an inconsistency in how the Pharisees were applying the law. Either way we would need to go to other parts of scripture to flesh out the teaching on divorce and adultery and we don’t have time for this this morning.
  
- So, returning to the principle of what Jesus is saying – he offers a warning to the Pharisees and it is sharp. Pay attention now to what is said and live now in the light of the gospel, the good news of Jesus.
- The error of the Pharisees is that they so compartmentalised their faith, that they lost sight of Jesus as the one who came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets.
- They had been entrusted with the Words of God which was pointing people to Jesus – but they blew it. They had got so distracted by the secular agenda, so consumed by what it brought them – that they had lost sight of the spiritual agenda. They missed the good news all together and that also meant they failed in their duty to tell it to the people.

PAUSE

Before we apply this, let’s just have a quick look at the lesson for the disciples.

**A Lesson for the Disciples**

- As we have seen, Jesus paints this picture for both the disciples and the Pharisees – he says - what you do now in this *secular* world has an impact on what your *spiritual* eternity will look like.
  
- Not that what one does now earns or buys our way into heaven. But how you live now is an indication of where your heart is.
- You either, *fail to recognise Jesus* (like the Pharisees) – and so allow the world to shape you.

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- Or, you *recognise Jesus* – and so shape your life accordingly.
- Jesus is telling this parable to his disciples to help them get the principle right.
- The good news of the kingdom of God is being preached and you are hearing it. What you do with that now – has an effect on what is to come.

LONG PAUSE

**How do we respond?**

- Okay – let's bring this together.
- Who is here today reading this parable?
- Sitting here are many who have known Jesus for a very long time. Being Christian is part of your DNA – that is wonderful.
- It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that for some here knowing Jesus is still something that you are working out. The fact that you are checking him out by joining us today speaks to your integrity. I hope we can help.
- And it might be that for some here today, if you were honest, you could say that you are just going through the motions.
- If what Jesus said to the crowds, to his disciples and to the Pharisees was a challenge, then perhaps there is a challenge for us as well.
  
- How do we respond?

First, there is a challenge to **recognise what Jesus has done for you.**

- Take the long view. Step back from the immediate. Think strategy. Don't let the urgent overshadow the important – Sounds like I am reading from a Leadership Manual doesn't it?
- Well friends, what Jesus says to the crowds, to his disciples and to the Pharisees is that there is an eternal future. It is real. It is good. And it is far better than what we have here.
- He *is* leading – and he is doing that by pointing to the better things.
  
- Now if you think that is simply a nice sentiment, wishful thinking even – then it might be worth recognising that for those better things to come, for that better future to be achieved, for that long-term strategy to matter – then a very important transaction needs to take place.
  - A debt needs to be slashed.
  - An account needs to be settled
  - Something has to be done about our sin.
  - Something has to be done, to ensure that when God calls us to account that there is nothing that gets in the way.

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- Jesus knows that for that better future to be *our* reality, then *he* needs to take the long view. He needs to take to the cross. He needs to die and by doing so he doesn’t just slash our debt, he absolutely wipes it clean - what we owe completely cleared. So that all those who are friends with him will be welcomed into his eternal dwellings.
- Our eternal future has been shaped by what Jesus knew he had to do when he presented himself to the Pharisees and authorities in Jerusalem.

Second, there is a challenge here to make sure we **listen rightly**.

- I don’t think we have to work out if we are more like the Pharisee or the disciples or even the crowds here.
  - For me, I am shaped by the secular world that we live in and I am also shaped by the good news about Jesus.
  - It does matter if I am more like the disciples, or the Pharisee, or the crowd – the encouragement is to ensure that I listen more to Jesus than to the world.
  - I cannot love both – when they pull in different directions.
  - Maybe for some here you feel that tension as well.
- Listen rightly because we know that death is real – and this parable makes it clear that there are eternal matters at stake.
- So, whoever we are, what Jesus says should give us pause for thought.

Third, **live in a way that does not divide the secular and the spiritual**.

- For the Christian this means making sure that you live what you believe in a world that may not agree with you.
- It means being wise or shrewd with all that God has given.
- It means when it comes to your Christian life - not thinking that there is a spiritual side (like the things you do as a Christian) and a secular side (like the things you do all the other times).
- Christians should not live with a bookshop faith as if we can pull the ‘Christian’ book off the shelf, and then close it to pull the ‘social’ book off the shelf, then close it to pull the ‘work’ book of the shelf, then close it to pull the ‘family’ book of the shelf.
- Every element of your life should be shaped by the good news of Jesus – the gospel should be core to all that you do. And that gospel conviction should be obvious to all in the way you live every element your life.
- For the person who is wondering about Christianity – take heart here. When you make decisions in faith, it will affect every part of your life, but that is actually good thing – because every part of your salvation is also secure.

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And finally, use **wealth and things of this world** (not primarily for your own benefit) but **for God and the benefit of others**.

- Having wealth, having possessions is not the issue here.
- It is interesting that the rich man in this passage didn't seem concerned that his manager had given away so much of his money.
- All we have, all we earn, all we enjoy today, comes because it is from God and he is generous in how he gives it to us.
- So, use your wealth, your time, your energy today - in ways that will speak of your future. Use those gifts for the sake of serving God and others – so that in eternity you will be welcomed not because you have left your wealth behind, but because you have used it to ensure so many others have heard from you about what Jesus did for them – and they are there in heaven with you.
- You cannot serve both God and money – so don't try. Be an eternal investor.

**Closing Prayer**

Recognise Jesus

Listen rightly

Do not divide the secular and the spiritual

Use what we have been given to invest eternally