

USE WEALTH TO GAIN FRIENDS FOR ETERNITY

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 today’s passage, Jesus gives us the parable of the shrewd manager. He teaches us that we should be a wise manager in this world, not to accumulate our worldly wealth, but to advance the kingdom of God. We learn that a wise manager loves God more than this world. May God help each of us to be a wise manager for the Lord!

I. THE PARABLE OF THE SHREWD MANAGER (1-8)

This parable was directed to Jesus’ disciples in the presence of religious leaders. Jesus wanted them to be wise managers. God has given each of us resources to manage in this world. There are two kinds of managers. One is wise and the other is unwise. Are some people born to be wise managers? No. God created each of us in his own image to be the steward of his creation. Everyone has the potential to be a wise manager. Let us learn from the parable how to be wise managers.

Look at verse 1. *Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions.”* The manager was entrusted to care of his master’s business. But he wasted his master’s possessions. How did he waste them? We don’t know the details. But one thing is clear. He was not a good manager. He was lazy and negligent. He let a lot of people borrow from his master, but he didn’t even know who owed how much. Huge debts piled up. People began to default on their payments. His master experienced a serious cash-flow problem. Above all, this manager betrayed his master’s trust. The master trusted him and gave him freedom to run the business; he did not require him to give daily report. The manager abused this trust by being negligent. Finally, his master called him into the office and said, “What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.”

As he was getting fired from his job, the manager came to his senses. 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, this man properly assessed his situation. Some people don’t want to acknowledge their problem. Instead, they try to justify themselves, blaming their employer or teacher. Some students, when they receive a bad grade on their report card, do not admit that their efforts deserved the grade. Instead, they blame the teacher. But this man accepted the fact that his wrongdoing caused the problem. Because of this, he could evaluate his situation objectively. He basically had two options: to become a ditch digger or a beggar. Neither was a good option. He wasn’t strong enough to dig. He didn’t have strong muscles. And he was too proud to beg.

What could the manager do? It seemed as though all he could do was to sit down, have a beer and complain to his wife. But this man did not give up. He found a way to overcome his situation. Spiritually speaking, he realized that he still had time to repent and be a good manager. When he made a decision to be a good manager, suddenly he was flooded with many ideas. What did he decide to do?

Look at verses 4-7. He said, "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 realized how he had neglected the accounts receivable. His master's cash flow was terrible because so many people were behind their payments. So he devised a strategy. He called in the debtors and reduced the amounts they owed by 50% in some cases and 20% in others. He did this without asking his master's approval. His personal motive was to gain favor of these people so that they would welcome him into their houses. He was a shrewd man. He was dishonest. But his last minute dealings solved his master's cash-flow problem and opened up opportunities for his future as well. On the verge of his dismissal, this man became a good manager for his master.

What was his master's response? Look at verse 8a. "*The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.*" The master commended the manager, not for his dishonesty, but for his shrewdness. The point of Jesus' parable is clear in verse 8b. 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 us to be shrewd, not dishonest. Jesus said this when he sent out his Twelve disciples on a training mission, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Mt 10:16). What does it mean to be shrewd? It means to have keen awareness, sound judgment, and resourcefulness, especially in practical matters. 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 learn to manage our resources well by depending on God.

The good managers of this world give their best to turn profits for their companies. They are dedicated to their work. They get up early in the morning. They put in 80 hours a week. They sacrifice many things to be successful managers. This is also true for spiritual managers. While on earth, Jesus was a good and shrewd manager. Once Jesus saw a blind beggar, begging on the roadside. This man's face was stained with dried tears. He had no hope for his future. Jesus' disciples became very fatalistic, looking at the pathetic creature. They asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (Jn 9:2) But Jesus didn't become fatalistic. He had no equipment with him to help the blind man. He didn't even have Visine or ointment. But he didn't give up. Do you know what Jesus did? Jesus spit on the ground, made some

mud with his saliva and put it on the man's eyes. The shepherd's heart of Jesus opened the blind man's eyes! Jesus was a shrewd manager!

II. USE WORLDLY WEALTH TO GAIN FRIENDS (9-13)

Let's read verse 9, our key verse, 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."* How can we use our worldly wealth to gain friends with eternity in heaven in mind? I remember a retired couple who used to live in my neighborhood. They were very thrifty for their own expenses, shopping their grocery in farmer's market and discount stores. But in helping others and giving to God, they were very generous. I think these couple practiced what Jesus said in verse 9.

Use your worldly wealth to gain friends for eternity. We learn that Jesus wants us to be wise managers so that we may advance the kingdom of God. Jesus wants us to be wise in doing God's work. We should use worldly wealth to gain friends so we will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. What is worldly wealth here? Some of you may say, "I don't have worldly wealth to manage. I don't own any real estates, stocks or bonds." Well, I believe Jesus' teaching still applies to you. Worldly wealth is more than money. It refers to all the resources God gave us to manage during our lifetime. It includes our time, our body, and our talents, in addition to our possessions. Most of all, it includes our hearts, minds, souls and strength (Dt 6:5). Jesus urges us to use this wealth for eternal kingdom of God. There are 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. They have much potential to be wise managers who can advance the kingdom of God. But they squander God-given resources as they live a selfish life, ignoring the work of God. The things that we enjoy so freely now, we cannot keep for long. Time is fleeting and 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.

Someday each of us will 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 fired from his job. 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.

Let us read verse 9 again. *"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 read the prayer topics of our UBF missionaries in Africa, Asia and South America, we

notice that many of them list “self-supporting” as their prayer request. They sell items such as shoes and clothes in stores or become tour guides to support their family and ministry, even though they had never been in such businesses before. They struggle to be good managers in their mission field so that their material wealth may be used to support their ministry. They use worldly wealth to gain friends in the Lord.

The best example of using worldly wealth to gain spiritual friends is our Lord Jesus Christ. He used his time for God and for others. He spent much time to teach the Bible. He taught from early morning until late in the evening. He prayed. He healed many sick people, one by one. Finally, he gave his life on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He did this to win us over to God and take us back to his kingdom. He said in John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus laid down his own life for us, his friends. Now he is sitting at the right hand of God, waiting for the day to welcome us into spiritual friendship with him 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.”* To become a wise manager, we must start 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 entrust us with more sheep. 1 Corinthians 4:2 says, “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”

Look at verses 11-12. *So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?* Notice that Jesus used the words, “trust” and “trustworthy” several times. This is an essential quality of a good manager. A man worked for a construction company all his life. As his retirement approached, the owner of the company asked him to build a house as his last project. Thinking that he no longer had to worry about his career advancement, he did not put his heart to this project. He didn’t use the best material for the house. He cut corners. He did a bare minimum to pass the inspection. It was not a solidly built house. When it was finished, his boss had a surprise announcement. The house was meant to be a retirement gift for the man. Can you imagine his disappointment? We must be trustworthy servants to the end in serving the work of God until we see Jesus face-to-face. He will say to us, “Well done, my good and faithful servant!”

Ultimately, being a wise manager is a matter of heart. Look at verse 13. *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”* Notice that Jesus said “No one can serve two masters.” He did not say, “No one should serve two masters.” You may be tempted to say that you can serve both God and money.

But Jesus says it is impossible. Why? We have only one heart. To serve two masters with one heart is like trying to be a fan of Steelers and Patriots at the same time. It is impossible to do this. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. If you try to serve two masters, you will end up serving neither one.

One of the worst train accidents occurred in 1944 in a tunnel near the village of Torre del Bierzo in Spain. More than 500 people were killed. This train had an engine on both the front and the end. On that day, as the train entered the tunnel, the front engine stalled. When the train stopped in the tunnel, the engineer on the back engine tried to get the train out of the tunnel, pulling it backward. Meanwhile, the front engineer managed to get the engine started again and tried to pull the train forward. They had no walkie-talkie. They continued to pull in both directions. Two more trains, including a coal train, entered the tunnel and collided with it, igniting a massive fire. Hundreds of passengers were burned to death. Trying to serve both God and money in life is like trying to pull a train from both ends. The result is death in eternity.

III. GOD KNOWS YOUR HEARTS (14-18)

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus (14). They felt that they had no problem with serving God and money at the same time. They sneered at Jesus. They thought it was ridiculous that Jesus was teaching his ragtag disciples to be wise managers of God's work. The disciples didn't have MBA degrees. They didn't even have BS degrees. The Pharisees could not understand Jesus' teaching because they had no love for God in their hearts; they loved money. They showed off their wealth, with their designer purple robes, while the disciples were wearing tunics from the thrifty store. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly 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 their 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 sinful lifestyle and appear holy before the eyes of men. But they were dishonest and unfaithful in the sight of God. Divorce was the epitome of their unfaithfulness. Jesus rebuked them so that they might repent their sins and turn to God.

In today's passage, we learned that Jesus wants each of us to be a wise manager who gives his heart to God's work. 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 help us to be wise managers who advance the kingdom of God!