



# FAITH AND GRACE CHURCH

## LEARNING FROM THE MASTER (JESUS CHRIST- OUR CHIEF CORNERSTONE)

### **STUDY 21-57 – THE PARABLES OF JESUS - Parable No. 32- Parable of the Unjust Steward**

**TEXT: Luke 16:1-13**

#### **LAST WEEK: The Cost of Being a Disciple (LUKE 14:25-35)**

LESSONS: - Although the gift of eternal life is free to anyone who asks, the asking requires a transfer of ownership. "Counting the cost" means recognizing and agreeing to some terms first. In following Christ, we cannot simply follow our own inclinations. We cannot follow Him and the world's way at the same time. Following Him may mean we lose relationships, dreams, material things, or even our lives.

#### **Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Parable of the Unjust Steward can be found in Luke 16:1–13. The text can be broken down into two parts: the parable (verses 1–8) and the application (verses 9–13). Luke 16:1 identifies that Jesus is speaking to His disciples, but there is a suggestion that His audience is mixed—disciples and Pharisees. See Luke 16:14 . We also see in verse 1 that Jesus "also" said to the disciples; the "also" would suggest that this parable is connected to the previous three in Luke 15 and that the audience was a mixed crowd of disciples and Pharisees.

The story is simple, but the setting is unusual. In most of Jesus' parables, the central character is either representative of God, Christ, or some other positive character. In this parable the characters are all wicked—the steward and the man whose possessions he manages are both unsavory characters. This should alert us to the fact that Jesus is not exhorting us to emulate the behavior of the characters but is trying to expound on a larger principle.

The parable begins with a rich man calling his steward before him to inform him that he will be relieving him of his duties for mismanaging his master's resources. A steward is a person who manages the resources of another. The steward had authority over all of the master's resources and could transact business in his name. This requires the utmost level of trust in the steward.

The steward, realizing that he will soon be without a job, makes some shrewd deals behind his master's back by reducing the debt owed by several of the master's debtors in exchange for shelter when he is eventually put out. When the master becomes aware of what the wicked servant had done, he commends him for his "shrewdness."

**Is it bad to be shrewd?** Not really. To be shrewd is to be keen witted, clever, or discerning in practical affairs. The dictionary equates "shrewd" to "common sense." It is a mistake to

associate being shrewd with bad things, like being selfish, stingy, greedy, cunning, or hard hearted.

In His application of the story in the remaining verses, Jesus begins by saying, "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light" (Luke 16:8). Jesus is drawing a contrast between the "sons of the world" (i.e., unbelievers) and the "sons of light" (believers). Unbelievers are wiser in the things of this world than believers are about the things of the world to come. The unjust steward, once he knew he was about to be put out, maneuvered to put others' debt to himself. He did so by cheating his master (who more than likely was cheating his customers). He made friends of his master's debtors who would then be obligated to care for him once he lost his job.

**What does this have to do with believers being wise about the life to come?** Let's look at verse 9: "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." Jesus is encouraging His followers to be generous with their wealth in this life so that in the life to come their new friends will receive them "into eternal dwellings." This is similar to Jesus' teaching on wealth in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus exhorts His followers to lay up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19–21).

That is, if even the wicked can plan for their future in their selfish and narrow-minded ways, are you planning for your future? Are you shrewd enough and clever enough, and do you have enough foresight to plan for the real future?

The term unrighteous (or worldly) wealth seems to strike readers the wrong way. But Jesus is not saying that believers should gain wealth unrighteously and then be generous with it. "Unrighteous" in reference to wealth can refer to 1) the means in acquiring wealth; 2) the way in which one desires to use the wealth; or 3) the corrupting influence wealth can have that often leads people to commit unrighteous acts. Given the way in which Jesus employs the term, the third explanation seems the most likely. Wealth is not inherently evil, but the love of money can lead to all sorts of sin (1 Timothy 6:10).

So, the principle that Jesus is trying to convey is one of a just steward rather than an unjust one. The unjust steward saw his master's resources as a means for his own personal enjoyment and advancement. Conversely, Jesus wants His followers to be just, righteous stewards. If we understand the principle that everything we own is a gift from God, then we realize that God is the owner of everything and that we are His stewards. As such, we are to use the Master's resources to further the Master's goals. In this specific case, we are to be generous with our wealth and use it for the benefit of others.

Jesus then goes on to expand in verses 10–13 the principle given in verse 9. If one is faithful in "little" (i.e., "unrighteous" wealth), then one will be faithful in much. Similarly, if one is dishonest in little, he will also be dishonest in much. If we can't be faithful with earthly wealth, which isn't even ours to begin with, then how can we be entrusted with "true riches"? The "true riches" here is referring to stewardship and responsibility in God's kingdom along with all the accompanying heavenly rewards.

The climax of Jesus' application is verse 13: "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" (see also Matthew 6:24). If God is our Master, then our wealth will be at His disposal. In other words, the faithful and just steward whose Master is God will employ that wealth in building up the kingdom of God.