

Jesus also said to his disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager who was accused of wasting his possessions. ²The rich man called him in and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you can no longer be manager.’

³“The manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, since my master is taking away the management position from me? I am not strong enough to dig. I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from my position as manager, people will receive me into their houses.’

⁵“He called each one of his master’s debtors to him. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶He said, ‘Six hundred gallons^[a] of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write three hundred.’ ⁷Then he said to another, ‘How much do you owe?’ And he said, ‘Six hundred bushels^[b] of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and write four hundred and eighty.’

⁸“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the children^[c] of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation^[d] than the children of the light are. ⁹I tell you, make friends for yourselves with unrighteous *mammon*,^[e] so that when it runs out, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings. ¹⁰The person who is faithful with very little is also faithful with much. And the person who is unrighteous with very little is also unrighteous with much. ¹¹So if you have not been faithful with unrighteous *mammon*, who will entrust you with what is really valuable? ¹²If you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you something to be your own? ¹³No servant can serve two masters. Indeed, 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 both God and *mammon*.”

¹⁴The Pharisees, who loved money, also heard all these things and sneered at him. ¹⁵He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the sight of people, but God knows your hearts. In fact, what is highly regarded among people is an abomination in God’s sight.

Footnotes:

- a. Luke 16:6 Or *one hundred baths*. A *bath* was about six gallons.
- b. Luke 16:7 Or *one hundred cors*. A *cor* was about six bushels.
- c. Luke 16:8 Or *people*
- d. Luke 16:8 Or *kind of people*
- e. Luke 16:9 *Mammon* is an Aramaic word that is transliterated in the Greek. It refers to *worldly wealth* (sometimes personified). It also appears in verses 11 and 13, and Matthew 6:24. It may also be translated *money*, but a different word for money is used in verse 14.

Motivators

Our high school soccer team played on a dirt field, there was no grass to slow down the ball, just a flat, dry, dusty field, because of that our strategy was to out run our opponents. Sadly this dirt field had a steep hill at its edge. It was 50 meters up and then 200 meters back around. Before the season began we’d train on this hill to get in shape. We’d run and run and run until we’d throw up

or pass out. If we weren't motivated during practice, coach would have us run this hill – which he called motivators. We were guaranteed to run at least one motivator per practice for conditioning and maybe more depending on if we needed motivation. Our motivation was to stay off the hill and keep playing on the field because none of us liked conditioning. That was enough motivation for us.

Our lesson shows the motivation of a dishonest manager and it's not hills, it's work. Jesus here takes a negative character and points out a positive characteristic. He's motivated to move quickly and no one has tied a pair of pork chops around this guy's neck and set free the dogs. There is no coach chasing him up a hill. He's a white collar worker who finds out he might have to do real physical work and he goes to great lengths to avoid it.

We all tend to work a little better/harder under pressure on the other hand some say they make more mistakes and don't like pressure. But when there is no motivation, little to no work gets done. We aim for an acceptable minimal effort. Jesus wants us motivated but he doesn't want us to think that our work, stewardship, management of the gifts he has given us earn our keep in heaven – that's not the point, proper motivation is. He wants us to see that no matter how much we've squandered on ourselves – we can always fall on the master's mercy and that is our motivator.

But that doesn't excuse this dishonest steward. After an accusation of mismanagement he's fired. And then he starts running, moving quickly he calls those who owe his master money. I'm not sure if he still has the books to the accounts. He has to ask how much they owe, *"How much do you owe?"* *"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.'* This is not a small debt. This is the whole crop of a large olive grove. This is the produce from 100 acres wheat. Both of these are great debts owed to his master but he doesn't seem to mind. You'd expect the right arm of fellowship followed by a verbal thrashing but instead the owner isn't that upset and he compliments the steward for fooling him one more time. Jesus then goes on to offer the same praise, "you could learn a lot from this guy." *"The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of light."*

The steward was commended not because of his dishonesty but because he acted decisively and wisely. He is a rotten scoundrel who deserves to be jailed until he repays for every gallon of oil and bushel of wheat that he slashed for their debt. He has trusted in the other gods of his master's money and it has failed him. It will no longer support him. He is no longer manager. He acts quickly and puts all of his effort into his plans and he succeeds.

He has done a huge favor for these farmers. He has built up some serious "brownie points" with these farmers. Moreover, he has made his master look generous. These farmers have no idea that this steward is acting alone, at this point they think this is the message from the one they owe. He not only earns brownie points he also makes his master look good in the process. So how would it look if suddenly the master went back on the word of his steward and reinstated the debt

they owed? He's placed in quite the pickle. This steward has padded his future at the expense of his master. He has friends on whom he can fall for future support. They will take care of him for his generosity. He knew how to use the resources at his disposal to make friends and he used everything to accomplish his goal. He is commended for his commitment and resourcefulness.

He is motivated, are we? Scripture tells us there isn't much time. God could come at any time. Justice will come upon sin. That is wrath should terrify us... but that's not how the Bible motivates. It may make us rush around a little faster, but our heart won't be in it, like this dishonest manager. The truth is, "*the children^[e] of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the children of the light are.*" Jesus concedes that unbelievers are more faithful in serving their gods than Christians are in serving the God. If a person worships money or is motivated by money – they will do everything in their power to earn more. If a person worships cars or experiences they will dedicate their life and live it for that sole purpose. But Christians – they are tempted to follow after other gods. We don't always serve the one true God we are tempted to serve God along side of our other gods of this world. It's worse than that.

We don't steward what we've been entrusted with, Word, Sacrament our greatest treasures, and even money and the time we have. This parable does talk about the importance of money. Money is never the end, it is a means to the end. It is a tool that we use for family, food, travel, life, and worship. Jesus says to, "*make friends for yourselves with unrighteous mammon,^[e] so that when it runs out, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings.*"

But when we make things, money, sleep, more important than the greatest treasures – we prove how un-shrewd we are. When we burn ourselves out trying to keep it all together the house, the family, and plan for the future – we are acting as god. We are still looking to ourselves for all that we need. These Idols wear us out by demanding we serve them and then reward us badly. They demand we get more, take care of. Money makes a terrible god and will fail us not "if," but "when."

The first commandment says we are to have no other gods before the one true god. That doesn't mean we have all our gods in a row and the Lord happens to be first that means there are no other gods at all. We are tempted to serve other gods. We waste what God has entrusted to us. Dishonest steward is a picture of us. Even more disturbing is the word for Steward is the word reserved for pastors.

And Jesus is speaking this parable to his disciples and the religious leaders are within earshot.

This all started when they grumbled that he welcomes sinners and eats with them. Jesus in turn tells three parables about the value God places on people and wanting all to be saved. There are a number of similarities between this parable and the Prodigal. Both squander – time or inheritance. Both are caught. Both hit rock bottom, form a plan, and fall on the God's mercy. They appeal to God's mercy and he is a merciful God. There wasn't anything else for this steward to do. He can't dig. He can't count on his strength to get him out of this. He's ashamed to beg.

He realizes that if there is to be any help – it has to come from outside of him. He can count on the Master's mercy. His plan won't work if the master is a hard man, reaping where he did not sow. He has no authority to act on his behalf anymore. He's shrewd. He knows at last what he can trust in – his master's generosity. His judge became his Savior. The owner commends this scoundrel. He makes him look generous. He has secured his future and he will be welcomed by those who were aided.

This parable is also for us. And there are many parallels between us and the dishonest steward. We have squandered our gifts. We have worshipped and served other gods. We are indebted to our master and there isn't anything we can do to repay. He's warned us. Help must come from outside of us. No amount of dedication or commitment to him will work. Salvation comes from God alone.

Fall on the master's mercy. He is generous. He's brought us into his family at baptism. He continues to give us his word and there he tells us how a debt wasn't cut in half or quartered but it was canceled for us at the cross. There on the cross Jesus said, "it is finished." That same word spoken from the cross was written at the bottom of ledgers when they were paid in full. Jesus canceled the written code that stood against us. We are commended by our father in heaven. All this has been done with our Father's full knowledge, by the hand of his Son who he sent into this world.

He has given us with many things to manage through this world. He has given me my wife. There is no better way to describe her than a gift from God, as well as children, body, mind, and all our abilities. Our God loves us and has given us so much, so maybe I'll resign my attempts to control the universe and let God be God.

You too have the same gifts. You support family and friends in many different ways and the words you speak seasoned with the word of God has an effect on others. Trust in the Lord to provide. Some day when you enter into your eternal dwellings you will be welcomed by those who you don't even know, those who were invited as God used you, your gifts, your time, your talents to grow his kingdom and that's the one thing he has allowed us to bring – family.

Our motivator is not some hill that we are threatened to run before we get any water but his love for us. You don't need to be afraid of God. Jesus points to him again and again as a God who seeks and saves the lost like that one out of 99, he is that woman who scour the whole house until she finds that one coin, he is like a forgiving father scanning the horizon and hoping to see his son come home, moreover he is a gracious master slashing debts and forgiving sin. That's our motivation. May his love motivate you to serve him with your whole heart. Amen.