

Week of March 25-31

PARABLE OF THE SHREW(D)

Scripture Reading: Read Luke chapter 16

Perhaps you are familiar with Shakespeare's play, *The Taming of the Shrew*? The play features a full five-act play performed within another storyline that frames the five-act play. This different style adds to the effect and reinforces the meaning Shakespeare sought to convey through the play. In a similar fashion, Jesus tells a different type of parable in the opening verses of today's chapter reading than we are used to seeing in the gospels.

In *The Parable of the Shrewd (or Unjust) Manager*, as it's sometimes called, the main character is accused of poor stewardship of his master's resources. The rest of the parable describes how he cooked the books so he would be taken care of by his master's debtors when he was let go. Now, one would assume such apparent dishonest activity would be condemned by the master in the parable and, if not by him, at least by Jesus. This is where the parable differs from what we expect. The rich man commended the dishonest manager and noted that he had acted shrewdly. Jesus echoes this commendation in the last half of verse 8 and in verse 9.

What is going on here? Why is Jesus praising dishonesty? When we dig a little into 1st century history and culture, we get an answer to our question. The Law of Moses prohibited the Jewish people from charging fellow Jews interest on loans. Masters of the house would hire managers and entrust their resources to them to oversee. Managers would add interest charges to a purchase but, then, provide a bill of sale that would not itemize the separate charges and this new bill was considered legal. It was an end-around to avoid the law against charging interest.

When the manager in the parable got into trouble, and realized the severity of the problem and his gloomy future, he rewrote the bills to remove the interest. The master of the house realized that the manager had acted shrewdly and praised him. The manager hoped to secure a place for himself with his master's debtors because they would be only too happy to pay just the actual charges. At the same time, the manager made the master look good, like a law-abiding religious citizen who didn't charge interest.

Jesus uses the example to challenge his followers in two ways: 1) The manager used his worldly wealth to prepare for his immediate future – how much more should believers use their God-given resources in a righteous fashion to benefit the eternal kingdom. 2) The manager realized the severity of the situation and acted accordingly for his future – how much more should believers, who have an eternal dwelling, live wisely.

Through the remainder of the chapter, Jesus reinforces these two points and drives home the fact that our use of wealth reveals a heart attitude about the kingdom. If we can't use worldly wealth in a godly way, then we really can't be trusted with true riches. If our hearts are in love with money, then we can't be devoted to God. The Pharisees wanted nothing to do with this line of teaching and sneered at Jesus (verse 14). Why? Because they loved money! Jesus rebukes them and the chapter closes as it opened with Jesus telling yet another parable about the use of money and the future, "*The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.*" Jesus is intent on making his point, isn't he? How we use our money matters to God.

So, what will it be for us? Are we devoted to money or to the King? Are we using our God-given resources foolishly or wisely, selfishly accumulating perishable goods or investing in an imperishable kingdom? We may enjoy Shakespeare tale's of the shrew, but we can learn a better lesson from the Parable of the Shrew(d) Manager.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Take some time to evaluate whether you are a good steward of God's resources. If you are not, then repent and take to heart Jesus' teaching in this chapter.

Take-away: *Our use of money outside reveals our heart attitude inside.*