

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Luke 16:1–15**

### **Sermon: What Kind of Steward are You?**

In our Old Testament reading we see the Lord's intense wrath on those whose greed drives them to cheat the poor and needy. Then in our Gospel we have the master seemingly commending the unjust steward for his cheating and theft, but we learn that it was for his shrewdness in securing for himself future friends.

Money can be a remarkably persuasive false god. Money sits on our shoulder and whispers into our ear: "Now listen to me. I'll give you a little freedom to do some things, but in the end, you will make all the important decisions in life on the basis of me. I'll let you fiddle around in the church and have a family and sit on the deck and enjoy a little bit of time not thinking about me, but when push comes to shove, I call the shots. Understood?"

You have in this parable the story of a man who had been accumulating wealth for himself. He was trusting that the needs of his life and his future would be secured through his savings account, his business dealings, and so forth.

We're told he was cooking the books, skimming money off the top, but like all of us who break the Seventh Commandment and steal money, he's figured out a way in his mind to justify it. He's overworked and underpaid. He's going to pay it back. He needs it more than his master. Whatever the reason in his own mind, his master's money is the solution. It is the thing in which he trusts.

Well, you can't trust false gods. And money is a false god. It doesn't care about you. It doesn't love you. And it will leave you. That's what happens in this parable. Everything this steward had been lying awake at night afraid would happen, happens.

His money abandons him, and he is left now to figure out something different in which to put his trust. What will it be?

***“There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg”*** (vv 1–3).

The steward is in a bad place, he is desperate. He’s stuck between a rock and a hard place, as the saying goes. That’s why Jesus includes his comment, “I can’t dig; I can’t beg.” His ship is sinking, and he doesn’t have a lifeboat.

Everything he'd worked for (a lifetime's worth of careful effort and planning, even if it was crooked) was gone.

The steward has been fired. From this point, he is no longer legally authorized to conduct any business in the name of his master. And if he does, it won't be legally binding. But take a moment to notice that the master does *not* throw him in jail. He could have, but he didn't.

Before everyone finds out that he has been fired the steward uses the short amount of time he has to take advantage of his master's reputation for being generous. The steward could have done a number of things to make things right. But he doesn't instead, he figures that his best shot at survival is to bank on his master's reputation for being exceedingly generous.

He had been trusting in his master's money, but that's gone. And now he begins to trust in the thing he should have trusted in all along: his master's generosity.

He quickly calls in each of his master's clients. You can tell, by the way, just how much clout this steward has—how quickly people come to him when he sends for them! Now, here's the key. The steward is fired, but these people don't know it yet, no internet or social media. So, one at a time, the steward calls in the clients. And here's how he does it. "He said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'"

He cancels about eighteen months' wages with each account. But did you notice that he has *them* change the amount? It happens in their handwriting, not his. This is an important detail, and the reason is this: the next thing the steward will do is take all these changed contracts back to the master.

And when he places the books on his master's desk to review, the master slowly realizes two things: first, these debts have been lowered, and second, my debtors know about it, because it's in their handwriting. If it had been merely in the steward's handwriting, he would just change them all back and there wouldn't be any harm; no one would have known.

But now the master sits back in his chair; he can hear the sound of a celebration party thrown in his honor—in honor of the most generous landowner that county has ever known.

These clients all assume that the steward just did what the master asked him to do.

The master looks up at his former steward and says, “Well played. You knew me. You knew that I would let this stand. You’re a crook and a scoundrel, but you’re really smart.” The text says,

***“The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness”*** (v 8a)—commended him not because of his character or ethics, but because of his shrewdness.

When his ship was sinking, he knew which way to jump. How does this help him? Well, he’s used the master’s generosity to make lots of friends. You know the phrase, “It’s not what you know; it’s who you know.”

The moral of the story? “Make friends for yourselves with unrighteous money, so that when it fails [when your money fails you, and it will] they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.”

Now let us pause to remember how blessed each of us are. Most of us have enough money to live comfortably. We may not have much in the banks or invested but we live okay. Jesus tells us to use what we have, not just money but all of God's blessings to help and care for each other, especially those in need.

There was this guy who came into a bunch of money all of a sudden: \$250,000. He decided to give 20 percent to missions: \$50,000. As it turns out, the other \$200,000 he invested in various things, spent a bunch of it, and you know the story. Within eighteen months, it was all . . . gone. He was later asked, "Don't you wish you had that \$50,000 back?" And he said, "No! That \$50,000 is the only part that's still doing any good." So for whatever else we use our money, this parable teaches that we have a Christian responsibility to support shrewdly and enthusiastically the work of the Gospel.

But there is a backstory to our text. It's not as though we labor under a master who is hard and cruel, but rather one who is unusually generous. And whether we've been faithful in our use of his money or have been less than faithful, have squandered it, wasted it, been selfish or greedy our Master is still good. And in our case, he loves us and sees us through. We are saved because of the generosity of our Master.

This is Jesus Christ, our Master. He loves and forgives sinners. He gives us more than just earthly wealth and goods; he gives us his body and blood on the cross to save us. And this is for free. We don't have to do a thing. We don't have to make back payments or make up for our sins or try to impress anyone. We don't have to do anything. He's done it for us. We don't even have to be "wise"; we just need to know which way to jump when our ship is sinking and let the grace of God in Jesus catch us.

We're going to be okay. Our Master loves us, indeed. Amen