

Can We Be Trusted? Luke 16:1-13

If we could somehow gather data on the things we talk about around here—whether in worship, Sunday School, and other gatherings—I think I’m right in saying that very high on that list we would find an emphasis on trusting Jesus.

We talk about trusting Jesus as Savior, trusting Him in moments of trouble, trusting in Him fully for the mercy, grace and guidance we need on a daily basis. I hope all of us here have placed our trust in Jesus Christ. This is the most important decision we make in life—to trust in Jesus.

But this morning, we’re coming at this matter of trust from a different direction. In our text--and certainly not just here, for we find this theme all through the Bible—but in this passage, we learn that our Lord also wants to be able to trust us. So the question we’re considering today is **Can We be Trusted?**

Maybe you haven’t thought of it in this way before, but Jesus seems to put His trust in us—not that we’re always worthy of it—but our Lord and Savior places His trust in those who claim to have put their trust in Him. So, again, can we be trusted?

Ponder that question as we hear this parable that Jesus told. We find in **Luke 16:1-13**:

¹ Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' 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—⁴I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

**⁵ "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'
⁶ " 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. "The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'**

⁷ "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.'

⁸ "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 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.

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. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

¹³ "No servant can serve two masters. 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 Money."

So what are we to make of this story? It's not one we hear often—and that's true for several reasons, I suppose. It's difficult to understand. And then, of course, it's a story about stewardship—so, to be honest, what we do understand, some may not like!

This may come as a surprise to you, but stewardship is not a popular topic with everybody. Now, it was for Jesus. He talked about stewardship often—but many folks who claim to follow Him simply choose to ignore what Jesus said about money.

In the case of this story Jesus told, even the titles we give to it are intimidating. It's usually called, "The Dishonest Steward;" although the NIV gives it a different title: "The Shrewd Manager." Let's see what we can learn from it.

The best clues as to its meaning come from Jesus' own words. After he tells the story, Jesus makes a few observations about it. Look at verse 8: "**The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.**"

Jesus says you have to hand it to this guy. He's smart. He gets caught cheating his employer, he's about to be fired because of it, so what does he do?

He calls in all the people who owe his employer money and he reduces their debts. He can't collect all that's owed, so he decides to at least get what he can.

Then what does he do? Well, maybe he takes the money to his master and saves his job. OR, he takes the money for himself and gets out of town. Guess what? WE'RE NOT TOLD!

But whatever he does with the money, his master decides that he has to give him credit for being clever. He praises the man's shrewdness. He's a rascal—sure—but we have to hand it to him: he's a *clever* rascal! So his master congratulates him for taking care of his own future so well.

Life was handing this man a lemon; but as the saying goes, he takes it and makes lemonade! He puts the best spin possible on a bad situation—that's all he does! So what are we to make of this?

Let's begin here. I really don't think Jesus is holding up this guy as an example for the rest of us.

He doesn't want us to admire his dishonesty or to in any way copy his actions. But Jesus does seem to want us to be impressed by the servant's shrewdness.

Why? Because this man very carefully plans his earthly future. He's about to be fired from his job, so he takes steps so as not to be left out in the cold—or the hot, as the case may be!

Jesus then makes the point that He wants his followers to be every bit as shrewd in planning their futures—specifically, their eternal futures—as this dishonest steward is in planning his much shorter-term earthly future.

Think about it. What if you and I were as eager to grow in compassion and generosity as this rascal was to attain money and comfort. If only we would give as much attention to the state of our souls as he gave the state of his finances.

And just what if we sacrificed as much time, effort, talent, and money for the cause of Christ and his church as we sacrifice for our

college sports, or club memberships, our immaculate yards, or expensive vacations, or... whatever.

Most of us know what gets the lion's share of our money and attention—so that's what we need to compare with what we give to Christ and the work that He calls all His followers to do. Do you hear what I'm saying?

Our Christian walk, our church life, will only be fulfilling to us when we spend as much of ourselves and our resources on these as we do all the other activities that our actions indicate we believe are more important.

Stewardship, as I think you know, involves everything we have and all that we are, but Jesus' focus in this story is on our money. Listen again to what he says in verse 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."**

Parents, have you ever praised your children for handling money responsibly? On the other hand, have you ever had to tell them that you didn't feel you could trust them with money? Praising them is better, of course, as long as they deserve it.

We get that, but now think about this. Our Heavenly Father wants to be able to trust HIS children with money—which for God means that we are first of all using our money for spiritual purposes, not just for selfish interests and concerns. How we use our money says who we are in relation to God.

In the Old Testament, God simply commanded his people to tithe—to return 10 percent of their crops, or flocks, or profits from whatever means of livelihood they had, to God.

But we're New Testament people. We've received the gift of God's Son, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and the fellowship of the Church.

What's more, we have the privilege of living in the most affluent nation in the world. Our financial blessings are beyond what most people can begin to imagine.

Still, we often question how much we should give. We wonder if the tithe still applies to us today. Well, the Bible tells us to **'give according to how the Lord has prospered us'** (1 Corinthians 16:2).

So, each of us must decide whether that should be anything less than a tithe—or if, perhaps, it should be more. And can you believe it—God trusts the likes of you and me to make this decision! For some reason, He believes that you and I have the capacity to be trustworthy!

Stewardship is all about trust—us trusting God, and God trusting us! Jesus tells here that when God sees he can trust us with smaller things, He then knows he can trust us with something bigger as well. Listen to **Luke 16:10-11**:

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. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

Parents often give their children allowances; or even better, they give them opportunities to earn money by doing jobs around the house or yard, which the children can then spend, save, or give as they choose. It's a wonderful learning opportunity.

Some children will blow all their money quickly and have nothing to show for it. A few will save it all and refuse to spend any of it. Some will give a portion of what they get if they've been taught the importance of this and the right example has been set before them.

Having to decide what to do with their money teaches children many things. Ultimately, though, they learn something about themselves. It's not just about the money. It's also about them—who they are. What's important to them.

In the same way, our Heavenly Father learns a lot about HIS children as He observes us putting to use the money and other resources He sends our way. Jesus made it clear that this is how the Father determines how trustworthy we are. Can He trust us with true riches...with what He calls 'eternal riches?'

If all the riches we have are here, friends, we don't really have anything at all! In fact, we can't get any poorer than having only earthly riches—that's true no matter how rich we think we are.

Each year, Forbes Magazine lists the names of the richest people in the world; but when the day comes and this life ends for the folks

on that list, someone's sure to ask, "How much did he or she leave?" We already know the answer, because it's always the same: "They left it all."

The point Jesus is making is this: if all we've got is right here—it doesn't matter what it amounts to, we don't have anything—nothing! This is why Jesus keeps reminding us that we don't "own" anything. We're stewards, managers, of what the Father entrusts to our care—and only for the brief time that we're here.

Nothing is permanently ours because when we leave here, not any of it goes with us. And more than anything else we can point to, what we do with our money shows whether or not we understand this to be true.

Our stewardship demonstrates whether or not we trust God--and, at the same time, it show whether or not God can trust us. If we genuinely trust God, then He's able to trust us--even with money. You see, God knows that if we can be trusted with money, we can trusted with anything—even with 'eternal riches.'

How important is this? Well, Jesus told 38 parables that are recorded in the New Testament. Nineteen of them, half of them, are about stewardship—being good managers of our possessions.

In all these parables, there's a King or a Master who goes away leaving a servant in charge of his possessions. He gives the servant total freedom to make decisions about how to manage his wealth. He trusts the servant to make good decisions and to manage his money wisely—this is what stewards do.

On a deeper level, Jesus' stories paint a picture of you and me in relationship with God. God takes a portion of what belongs to Him and shares it with us to take care of it for a while.

He trusts us to make good decisions, to manage what he's given us in a way that shows we have the interests of God and his Kingdom at heart. We're trusted to be good stewards of God's resources.

Now, the Lord tells us specifically that the tithe is His—so we talk a lot about tithing when speaking of stewardship. But maybe stewardship is not really as much about tithing as it is about trusting.

Remember how Jesus ended this parable? He said:

"No servant can serve two masters. 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 Money."(v. 13)

Some of us are more familiar with older translations that say, "You cannot serve both God and **Mammon**." You may think that "mammon" is just an ancient word for "money," but it's not.

Mammon was the name of the pagan god of riches and wealth. Modern translations are helpful, but this is one place where they could cause us to miss the whole point.

When Jesus says it's either God or Mammon that we're serving, he's not pitting God against our bank accounts, but God against *another god*--a competing god—a god who clearly wants to take the Lord God's place in our lives—namely, the god, Mammon.

Jesus says as clearly as He can that if God can trust us with money, then He really is our God. If God can't trust us with money, then Mammon is our god...because Mammon, the money-god, is who we're serving.

This is not about tithing. It's not about budgets. It's not about how much we have...or how little. This is about who we trust.

Do we trust God enough to be good stewards? Do we trust God so fully that He, in turn, can trust us—that God can trust us with money, and with all the other blessings He wants to give us?

Just remember again how blessed we all are. Reflect for a moment on how much we have.

Now, with the ears of our hearts, let's listen and hear our loving, gracious Father God saying to us, "I trust you. With all that you are and all you have, my dear precious child, I trust you."

Friends, that's the God I choose to trust and serve and obey. I invite all of us to do this—to prove ourselves trustworthy in our relationship with God.

Trust him! With everything you are and all you have, demonstrate your deep, abiding trust in the Lord. And as you do, always remember how remarkable it is that He trusts you and me. Let's not disappoint Him!