

## Managing Life

Luke 16:1-9; Coast Community Church; Pastor Earl Miles; 1-6-19

### Transforming Grace (1a)

This story comes on the heels of the story of the Prodigal Son. It is commonly known as the story of the Unrighteous Steward. Is there a connection between the two? The elder son and the younger son in the story of the Prodigal Son both valued the father's possessions more than the father himself. This parable is very much about money/possessions.

*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? – Romans 6:1-2*

*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! – Romans 6:15*

Paul is arguing in Romans that the grace that justifies is the grace that sanctifies! The grace that forgives the prodigal son also transforms the prodigal son. The mismanagement of the rebellious prodigal becomes the proper management of the restored son. ('squandered' in 16:1 is the same word for 'squandered' in 15:13)

How is 'sin' pictured in this story? Sin is pictured as mismanagement of what belongs to another.

### Under New Management (1b-8)

A rich man has a manager of his large estate. The manager is mismanaging the master's estate (not clear that there was any illegal activity). The master gets a negative ('hostile') report about the manager, believes it, fires the manager and calls for the manager's written records. The manager doesn't want to go back to menial labor and is too proud to beg, so, fearing homelessness, he comes up with an idea (could be translated 'I've got it!') to put himself in favor with the master's debtors. Two examples of what the shrewd manager did that both involve large sums of money (100 measures of oil would be valued at 1,000 denarii or over 3 years' wages for the average laborer; 100 measures of wheat would be valued at about 2500-3000 denarii or 8-10 years' wages for the average laborer). There are a number of ways we might understand this parable (which makes it one of the most challenging to understand)! One way is to see the Lord Jesus affirming the strategic action of the manager without affirming the morality of the action. The manager had not committed a crime but had mismanaged the master's estate. When he is fired, he shrewdly adjusts each debtor's bill in order to gain their favor. The debtors and the public would assume that the manager was acting on behalf of the master and would praise them both. In this case, the master would not expose the manager's ploy lest he be seen in a negative light, as a result. Another way is to see the manager actually doing the right thing and eliminating the interest on each account which was forbidden by the Mosaic Law anyway. If the second way is right, this might explain why the owner finds himself unable to criticize what the

manager did and, to save face, must commend the manager for his shrewdness. A third view is to see the manager as eliminating his own commission in order to gain the favor of those in debt. Is the unrighteous manager doing the right thing (cutting out his commission or eliminating unlawful interest) for his own selfish reasons? Or is the unrighteous manager doing the wrong thing (cutting out his master's profits) for his own selfish reasons? Either way, the point of the story remains the same: live in such a way that you prepare for the future by wisely managing the resources that belong to another, namely, God.

*<sup>15</sup> Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of your time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. – Ephesians 5:15-17*

Paul argues that we are to live our lives wisely, according to the will of God in each area of our lives. What are the areas of our lives in which we are to live wisely? Five relationships: (1) God (2) Church (3) Family (4) Workplace and (5) World. And a significant part of each of these relationships involves the use of money and possessions!

### **Divine Welcome (9)**

The 'wealth of unrighteousness' is money or possessions which are often acquired or used in unrighteous ways or pursuits. We can't take our money and possessions with us, so one day they will 'fail' (when we die). The 'they' who will receive us may refer to those we help here and who precede us to heaven or it may be a way of referring to God (a common Jewish use of the plural to refer to God and avoid using the divine name). How we use our money and possessions and how we manage our lives will have a bearing on whether and how we are received into heaven.

*<sup>14</sup> Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup> See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; <sup>16</sup> that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. <sup>17</sup> For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. – Hebrews 12:14-17*

We are not saved by works but our works testify to the reality of our faith. This parable encourages us to (1) see sin as mismanagement of what belongs to God (2) God's heart for us to pursue our good (3) that God's grace forgives sins and frees from sin (4) that friendship with God is doing His will (John 15:14) (5) that serving others *is* serving ourselves (in the best sense) (6) that managing money is managing life and (7) that living well now requires living for the future.

*<sup>18</sup> But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." – James 2:18*