

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

You have probably heard this opinion: “Well, it’s just a matter of interpretation.” Really? If you’re single and you tell someone, “I’d like to go on a date with you,” imagine how you would feel if the person replied, “Well, that’s a matter of interpretation. What I really think you’re saying is that you want to steal my car.” If you encourage someone with, “Good job! Well done!”, you’re likely to be hurt if the person does some interpreting and replies, “Why do you hate me?” Words mean things. People who use words are trying to communicate. If we are going to be honest listeners and readers, doesn’t it make sense to figure out what the communicator was trying to put across? Let’s do this with Jesus’ parable of the dishonest manager.

<sup>1</sup>*Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions.”* Jesus doesn’t specify whether the manager was actually guilty of mismanaging the master’s money, but based on how the manager behaves after hearing he’ll soon be out of a job, most people believe that Jesus had in mind a dishonest manager.

<sup>2</sup>*So [the rich man] called in [his servant, his employee] and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you*

*cannot be manager any longer.’*

“Prepare your books for an audit. I’m certain I’ll find proof of what you are being accused. That’s why I’m already telling you: you’re fired.”

We don’t hear the manager claiming, “But I’m innocent! And when you audit the books, I’ll be proved a faithful steward.” Instead *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— I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’* Self-preservation. It’s amazing what people will do when their livelihood is being threatened. Listen again to the brilliant scheme this guy comes up with. <sup>5</sup>*He called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’* <sup>6</sup>*‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’* <sup>7</sup>*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.’* Well how do you like that? He’s throwing away even more of the master’s money. It’s not about revenge for being treated unfairly. It’s about making sure he can eat. That’s probably why this dishonest manager treats the first debtor different from the second. He understands people. If the

FBI existed back then, he could help profile people for the behavioral analysis unit. His plan is to keep a list of everyone whose bill he has adjusted. Then after he is fired, he can show up at the house of one of these guys and say, “Hey buddy, remember how I saved you a bundle on your debt to my master. I need a favor from you; will you put me up until I find a new job?” He knows that if a new job doesn’t come along soon enough, the first guy will kick him out. Then he will take out his list of debtors he helped, and stay at the next guy’s house for a while. The more likely a debtor is to keep him, the more generous the manager is when he adjusts the bill of that debtor.

Now if you were the master, how would you have reacted? I’d have burst a vein in my forehead, first because this dishonest manager just cost me even more, and second because I was too foolish to watch this guy like a hawk so that he didn’t do any more damage. But Jesus wants to make a different point. What is it? **OUR SAVIOR SEEKS SHREWD AND SAVVY SERVANTS.** And that’s why in Jesus’ parable *8The master commended the dishonest manager*. Yes, commended him. “You did a really good job! Well done!”

But here’s where we can get off track. It sounds like the master is commending his servant for dishonesty. But that can’t be the case. Jesus doesn’t want

anyone to practice dishonesty of any kind. Lying is never commended in the Bible. Yet **OUR SAVIOR SEEKS SHREWD AND SAVVY SERVANTS.**

I imagine that the master had a good yelling session in the privacy of his home. But somewhere along the line, he put himself into the shoes of his servant, understood what the servant was trying to accomplish, and decided to tell him, “I’ve got to hand it to you. You really know how to take care of yourself, don’t you? It’s too bad you’re such a dishonest schnook. I would very much like to have kept your talent working for my benefit.” See? *8The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.* The whole point of this parable is to get us believers to think carefully about how we manage our Master’s money. **OUR SAVIOR SEEKS SHREWD AND SAVVY SERVANTS.** He wants us to think of ourselves as his stewards, his managers—because that is what we are. **Our** names might be on the checking accounts and the credit cards, but it’s God’s money (Psalm 24:1). And we are answerable to him for how we use it.

**OUR SAVIOR SEEKS SHREWD AND SAVVY SERVANTS.** In other words he wants us to avoid two extremes when it comes to money. Most of the time we hear him saying, “Don’t love money. Don’t store up

treasures on earth. Don't worry: I'll take care of you." That's one extreme we are to avoid: don't worry, don't hoard. Many of us are still learning this lesson. But others of us have taken it too far the other way. We aren't too smart when it comes to money. We buy homes or cars or other stuff we can't really afford, not if we are being faithful to our Master. If the only thing you're focused on when you buy something is whether you can make the payments, you might not be a savvy servant like the Savior seeks. Or we try to be nice and help someone who has gotten themselves into a financial jam, and in the process we give away too much and hurt ourselves.

No wonder Jesus says, *the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light*. Yeah, there are countless unbelievers out there who are really savvy when it comes to money. They've dreamed up all kinds of money generators and investment devices. They set up foundations to take care of their favorite cause, even if it's a beloved pet. These people are really shrewd and savvy. But they don't serve the Savior, so it's all a waste in God's eyes.

In modern lingo Jesus is saying, "Wouldn't it be great if all those who

believe in me, and not just some, were just as shrewd and savvy with the money I entrust to them? Wouldn't it be great if they would take the abilities I give them, work hard, make lots of money, and NOT lose their faith in the process? And then wouldn't it be great if all my people, and not just some, would get their spending habits under control, and would set aside the first portion their income for my work so that every week there was plenty to fund all facets of gospel ministry? Wouldn't it be great if all my people, and not just some, would learn wise personal finance, and save up a nest egg, and go see a financial planner, and draft an estate plan that would include, not just helping the disadvantaged, but especially spreading the gospel?" Did you know, only three out of ten people have drawn up an estate plan? And only one out of those three have remembered any charity whatsoever in their will. Yet in the next 20 years billions and billions of dollars will be passed from one generation to the next. We members of St. John's have access to WELS gift planning counselors who know shrewd and savvy ways to help us set up our estate, so that it can benefit our loved ones AND our favorite charity AND can save us from significant taxes. Wouldn't it be great if we had to start having special congregational meetings to wrestle with the question:

“What are we going to do with all these offerings that God’s grateful people have brought to Jesus? Hey, let’s help that sister church over there who is struggling. Let’s call a resident missionary to work outreach with us in our area. Let’s pay the tuition of a student in the teacher track at Martin Luther College, or a pastor candidate at our seminary.” You get the idea.

This is what Jesus is driving at when he says, *“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”* He doesn’t mean that you should buy some friends or gather an entourage. And in saying, *“...so that when it is gone...”*, he doesn’t mean ‘spend it all on your friends.’ He means: use a portion of whatever wealth God has entrusted to you to show love to whomever the Lord puts you in contact with. Truly be a friend because everyone needs real friends. And when you gain them as friends, tell them about Jesus being their Savior from sin too. When you have set aside for the Lord a percentage of your income that is appropriate for your circumstance, direct a portion of that for **missions**, because that money will help fund our missionaries who go in our place to tell the people in Africa or Asia or the Americas that Jesus lived and died for them too.

And at the end of your life, when money can no longer help you, (or to use Jesus’ wording: *“when it is gone”*), imagine what it will be like to show up at heaven’s gate, and someone from Brazil or Viet Nam says, “You’re finally here. Welcome! And thank you for sending that missionary to tell me about Jesus.” And then a Lake City resident you didn’t even know walks up to you and says, “I went to St John’s Lutheran School. Your teachers taught me Jesus stories every day. It took a few years for the seeds of the gospel to produce much fruit in my heart, but the Holy Spirit blessed the Word, brought me to faith in Jesus, and here I am in heaven. Thanks for operating that Lutheran Elementary School of yours!”

People of God, what are you already doing to gain friends and share the love of Jesus with them? Whatever it is, thank God for helping you make a good start. Now ask yourself: “What else can I do with this worldly wealth I’ve been given? Jesus died on the cross for little old me. So I’m definitely going to heaven. How else can I be a **SHREWD AND SAVVY SERVANT** of the SAVIOR?”