

# Who Do We Serve?

## Faithful in little, Faithful in much

Luke 16:1-13  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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Today, we encounter one of the strangest stories Jesus ever told. The parable of the so-called "dishonest manager". Here's a man caught in corruption, cooking the books, reducing debts to save his own skin. The manager has misused and squandered his master's resources. Facing unemployment after dismissal, he panics. But then he devises a plan. He calls the master's debtors and reduces what they owe. And remarkably, the master, instead of being furious and condemning him, commends the manager for being shrewd.

This story should make us a bit uncomfortable. Why would Jesus praise such a questionable character? It doesn't fit neatly into our categories of good and bad, right and wrong. But maybe that's the point. Jesus tells this story not to endorse dishonesty or corruption, but to shake us loose from conventional thinking about money, power, and what faithfulness looks like in God's economy.

Let's start here: the manager works in a system already unjust. Wealthy landowners in first-century Palestine controlled most of the land. They most often built fortunes by exploiting peasants, who worked as tenant farmers, charging impossible debts, and trapping families in cycles of poverty. So when the manager "reduces" what people owe, he's not so much stealing and cheating as redistributing money and thus power. He cuts through an already exploitive system, including the inflated interest rates, making survival possible for ordinary people.

Maybe that's why Jesus admires him—not for dishonestly cheating his master, but for being shrewd enough to use money in a way that lifts the burdens of others. He had the courage to upend a crooked system for the sake of relationships and survival. It's as if Jesus is saying: "Even the corrupt know how to work the system for their survival. How much more should my followers know how to work toward justice, generosity, and life?"

And then Jesus drops the punchline: "You cannot serve both God and wealth." That hits home. Because money is never neutral. It can be used to hoard power, or it can be used to heal. It can become a false god, demanding our loyalty, shaping our priorities, consuming our imagination. That's wealth as *Mammon*. While money is a good servant, it's a terrible master. Mammon is the power that says:

- Some lives are worth more than others.
- The rich deserve their wealth, and the poor deserve their suffering.
- Human dignity can be measured in dollars.

Mammon is alive and well today. We see it in:

- A system where billionaires add to their fortunes while so many live paycheck to paycheck.
- A healthcare and insurance system rationed by ability to pay instead of human need.
- A system that bankrupts families for the "crime" of getting sick.

- A housing market where homes are treated primarily as an investment strategy rather than basic human needs.

This is Mammon at work – an unjust economy demanding our loyalty. But Jesus offers another way: God's economy. That's an economy where wealth is used as a tool of grace, justice, beloved community, and care for the most vulnerable. In God's economy, value is not measured by net worth but by the truth that each person is beloved. That's why Jesus tells this parable. Even a shrewd, compromised manager figures out how to use wealth to build relationships, to lighten burdens. And Jesus says: "If he can do that, how much more should my followers do the same?"

Therefore, money itself isn't the problem. Money as a master is. In God's hands, wealth becomes a tool – not for control, but for community. So the question isn't whether we will use money. The question is: who or what will my money serve? It can feed a family, help educate a child, build a church, a hospital, a homeless shelter.

Jesus goes on to tell us that those who are faithful in little will be faithful in much. How we handle small responsibilities – especially money – reveals our character and trustworthiness before God. The test of our discipleship isn't how much we have, but how we use what we have. Faithfulness begins in small acts: paying a worker a living wage, choosing ethical investments, giving to sustain ministries of compassion, refusing to participate in systems that exploit. These may seem like "little things," but together they bear witness to a God who calls us into a different kind of economy—the economy of grace. Our small acts of justice, compassion, and generosity participate in God's larger vision of justice for the world.

With God, our generosity doesn't depend on having a lot, but on being faithful with what we do have. Here's an example. Not long ago, a small congregation in the Midwest discovered one of their members had \$50,000 in medical debt. Instead of just raising money to help that person, they partnered with a nonprofit that buys up medical debt at pennies on the dollar. With the \$10,000 they raised, they canceled \$1 million in medical debt for hundreds of families across their region. That's the gospel in action. That's using money not as a master, but as a tool for liberation. That's shrewd. That's faithful. That's turning an unjust system upside down, using the tools of the world to advance the kin-dom of God.

So what do we do with this strange parable? What does it mean for us? We hear Jesus' challenge: "Be as creative, as persistent, as shrewd in building God's kin-dom as the world is in building wealth." Don't settle for playing by the world's rules. Imagine new ways to live generously. The choice Jesus lays before us is stark: **Whom will we serve – God or wealth? Again, Jesus tells us we cannot serve both.**

If we serve Mammon, we will always be anxious, always competing, always hoarding. But if we serve God, our lives can be marked by generosity, freedom, and joy. When we serve God, money can become more than currency—it can become compassion in action, justice on the move. The dishonest manager reminds us that even in a crooked system, we can act with creativity, courage, and compassion. We can use what we have – little or much – to serve God's economy of grace.

May we, as individuals and as College Hill, be faithful in the little things, and in the much. May we use what we have not to serve Mammon, but to serve the living God, who is making all things new. What small practices could you build into your life to remind you that God – not money – has your heart? May our money, our time, and our lives become instruments of God's justice in the world. Let us choose to serve God!

Amen.