

## Worldly Wise

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### Luke 16:1-8

**Luke 16:1** And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

**Luke 16:2** And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

**Luke 16:3** Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

**Luke 16:4** I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

**Luke 16:5** So he called every one of his lord's debtors *unto him*, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

**Luke 16:6** And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

**Luke 16:7** Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

**Luke 16:8** And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

We want to focus on verse 8 for our central theme. The Greek word “generation” in this verse should be understood to mean much the same thing as generation does to us today (the period of time, in which we live). This idea then, includes the cultural setting, the social setting, the business setting of the person.

We want to remember that this is a carnal or temporal boss who is commending the unjust caretaker. That is to say, a man of the world is recognizing shrewdness and an opportunistic and lobbying spirit in another.

We must also understand what wise means in the context of this parable. Wisdom generally means application of knowledge toward a beneficial and productive end. The limiting phrase for understanding the limits of the wisdom Jesus is speaking about is “in their generation.” This phrase limits the **time frame and the environment** for the kind of wisdom He is talking about.

Then, we want to be aware that our Lord was contrasting the earthly journey of a man of worldly mindedness against the earthly journey of a man of spiritual mindedness. This is very important, because if we miss this, we might imagine that the Lord Jesus is commending corrupt, deceitful, opportunistic, and cheating business practices, when what he is really teaching by pointing to the boss's commendation of the unjust caretaker is the steward's shrewd use of money to gain security and make important men beholden to him. In other words, from the world's point of view, this steward was wise in what he did because he used money available to him to ensure an advantageous future.

The construction of the statement in this verse by our Lord allows us to understand that the last

phrase could be applied to either the boss who commended the caretaker, the caretaker himself, or both of them. We usually take Christ's words to be something said about the unjust steward, but it could have also included the boss. Now, how might we apply the statement to the boss? Like this: the boss was comparably worldly wise in his time; and it is revealed to us by his commending the caretaker. He was wise I say, because he undoubtedly knew that those debtors the caretaker collected that money from would probably have never paid their debt, since it was the caretaker that knew that they were debtors. I would guess that the boss did not handle the books, and based on the statement of the caretaker, it looks like he we can tell that had supervision and authority over the boss's lending activities. (otherwise, he could not have been able to change what they owed by just a statement). His collecting of that money brought some of the money back to his boss. Although there was some loss, it was not total loss. The boss was wise enough to recognize this.

Now, let us trust the Holy Spirit to guide us into some lessons about this incident the Lord used to convey a message.

I. They are **wiser in their generation because** the human cultures of the world are built on the kind of "wisdom" that is a natural product of the unregenerate human mind, and so ensure that the children of this world function better in such a man-molded society.

- We should all realize that human societies function on worldly wisdom. There are rarely any exceptions. The United States began as a nation founded on other principles; but we can see that it has degenerated into just another country that follows so-called human wisdom.
  - Here is an example of human wisdom among the societies of man - Man's handling of crime and punishment across the world - 74% of countries of the world do not practice the death penalty for crimes; in the U.S. more than half of the states have abolished the death penalty or are considering it (16 already abolished, 10 considering it)
  - God explicitly commanded it for certain crimes (Exodus 21; Leviticus 20)
  - To the human mind, without the understanding of God, killing members of society is unduly brutal and cruel. This attitude carried to the extreme will actually extend to criminals who have mass murdered hundreds of people; criminals who have committed atrocities of the most brutal kind. Yet, people think this kind of liberalism is wisdom, they can give reasons why it is, and are supported by fellow humans who think the same way. In 74% of the world's countries, if you thought it was cruel and inhuman to put murderers, kidnapers, etc. to death you would be considered wise. By this process, the human intellect and human emotion becomes the god which defies the true God who owns the universe. On the other hand, if you support the law of God about capital punishment, you will not do well in a generation that is totally sold on the human-made wisdom of abolishing the death penalty.
- This example should help us understand why the children of this world are wiser (relative to the worldly definition of "wise") in the culture and the times that they live in than are the children of God. Not wiser about spiritual things, but more adept and fit in better in a society that is founded on human wisdom. This is what Christ was saying in His lesson.

II. **Why** are they worldly-wiser in the present generation than children of light?

- First, they are wiser regarding making their way amongst those of the worldlings about them because they are both **willing and free to practice bribery, and deception, and curry**

**favors at the expense of others** (these may be called users of others without the interference of conscience-this is what our caretaker has done in the illustration Jesus presents).

- This kind of worldly wisdom is wonderfully illustrated by the practice of lobbying and power politics
  - ▶ Lobbying, for the most part, is the craft by which special interest groups bribe politicians to favor them
  - ▶ The effects of lobbying are seen in power politics where elected officials spend tax dollars to fund projects that are wanted by groups who supported them in their election (we usually call this payoff).
  - ▶ Children of light have constraints we call the Christian Ethic (which, when practiced makes them look like novices in the midst of those practicing worldly wisdom):
    - **2Cor. 4:2** But have **renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness**, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but **by manifestation of the truth** commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.
  - ▶ If a child of God participates in a lobbying scam to get tax money for a special interest objective, he is participating in a kind of dishonesty and craftiness, since lobbying itself is a device of deception
    - **1Thess. 4:6** That no *man* go beyond and defraud his brother in *any* matter: because that the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.
  - ▶ If I bribe a politician into giving my special interest group tax money, I have defrauded you who paid the taxes.
- Say a word here about the will of the majority vs. modern lobbying and special interest funding that results from current power buying lobbying activity.
  - ▶ Illustrate: if the majority of Americans wanted better federal roads, it would be wise of them to send a representative body to congress to “lobby” for that, while having a Senator write a bill or funding rider on a bill to pave all the roads in his county in California to curry votes and satisfy those who voted for him at the expense of you taxpayers here in Tennessee, that is nothing less than fraud. But it is the wisdom of this generation to game the system to do that. A Christian acting according to the principles of Christ and thinking things out, would never conduct himself that way.
  - ▶ End result: all the wiseacres of this generation will force their political will on America, but Christians will yield to the principles of Christ and be used by those who operate by unregenerate human principles.
- Second, they are wiser in making themselves a place in this world because they have their focus on the world and its things
  - ▶ Illustrate: Coyotes are some of the slickest animals in the world. They can slip around almost like ghosts. They seem to know every detail of things going on around them. They are experts at making a living out in the wild. Why? Because that is their element; living out in the wild is all their focus. They are doctors of survival. This is very similar to what we mean when we say that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than believers. It is because their daily lives are a study in fleshly behavior and how to go forward in the world and how to use the principles of the world to get ahead.

### III. **What lessons** may we learn from such men? (See **Luke 16:9-13**)

- There are almost numberless ways to behave immorally, unethically, and without principle in

handling the wealth and influence of this world. Many of these “ways” are acceptable to the generation we live in. All of these “ways” only have the potential to gain us wealth and influence here on earth, during our short life span.

- **v.9** - There is a way to make our handling of earthly wealth and power work eternal benefit for us; but it does not in any way include living by worldly wisdom.
  - ▶ When we start looking at how to behave regarding our handling of worldly possessions and influence, we should look at the everlasting results of our behavior
  - ▶ Being faithful to the principles of God is more important than anything we can gain here by doing it the wrong way
- vv. 11-12 - We cannot expect the Lord to reveal deeper things of faith to us, nor pass along to us the richer blessings of being a child of God if we mishandle the temporal, material things of this world
- Accept that lost men will think that they have the liberty to act like heathens in their social, cultural, business and personal dealings (not as though it is accepted by the Lord); but you don't
- Your true riches lies in the wealth of approval by Christ and in the riches laid up in store for you in the Kingdom of God