The Parable of the Shrewd Manager
(Luke 16:1-13)

NIV
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— 4 I 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?’ 8 ‘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.’

The Picture
Jesus was teaching His disciples (v. 1), but allowing others to overhear what was being taught (Pharisees were present, v. 14). Jesus’ teaching often was applicable to more than one group, and this occasion is no different. Here, he both instructs His disciples, and condemns the Pharisees.

Jesus is going to provide an example that, in many ways, seems strange to us today. He takes a negative situation between an unbelieving steward (a person of “this world”, v. 8) and his master to teach His disciples about shrewdness, while allowing the Pharisees to see themselves as men of “this world”.

Household stewards (managers) were common among the rich of this era. All present would have been familiar with stewards who would have been positive role models in Scripture: Eliezer, Abraham’s servant (Genesis 15:2; 24), and Joseph in the house of Potiphar (Genesis 39), were righteous men, examples of great integrity who had their master’s best interests in mind. They also would have been familiar with many household managers who were dishonest in their dealings, men with only their own “best” interests in mind. It is against this backdrop that Jesus unfolds the Parable of the Shrewd Manager.
Who’s Who & What’s What

- The Rich Man & the Shrewd Manager are not allegorical personalities. They do not represent something different than what is simply described in the passage. The characters would be common enough that all would understand. It is the events and behavior that Jesus focuses on.

Questions to be answered

- Is Jesus commending dishonesty? No! Even in the passage, it is the master (a business man of the world), not Jesus who commends the dishonest manager. Even in his commendation it should be noted that it is his shrewdness, not his dishonesty that is being commended.

- What is shrewdness and how should a Christian be shrewd? In Matthew 10:16, Jesus tells His disciples, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” Shrewd can have a good sense – prudent, wise, learned, and sensible are a few of the positive connotations of shrewd. As believers we should not be naive to the ways in which unbelievers deal and act. If we are not to be taken in by shrewd arguments and business dealings, we ourselves must be shrewd, while not behaving in a manner other than that of an “innocent dove.”

- For what should the shrewd manager be commended?
  - He assessed correctly and acted immediately upon a serious situation.
  - He understood the ramifications for his behavior.
  - He worked to secure his future.

- In what ways are we stewards? As Christians, we are stewards of this generation (cf. Ephesians 5:15-16). We are to make proper use of our money, our time, and the gifts, both spiritual and otherwise, for God’s glory!
  - We are steward of our time! Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15-16).
  - We are stewards of our gifts! Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:10).
  - We are stewards of the Gospel! …we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts (1 Thessalonians 2:4).
  What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us (2 Timothy 1:13-14). And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2).
o We are stewards of our body! Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

We are to be stewards of all that we have, because it all belongs to God. It is much more than tithing 10% of our income with the thought that we can do whatever we want with other 90%. It all belongs to God and should be used in a way that will bring glory to His Name.

What is the point(s) of this parable?
1. Use all resources wisely, especially worldly wealth! This passage provides a warning. If you “have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches” (v. 11). “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much” (v. 10). Because, if you “Have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?” (v. 12).

2. No one 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). This same thing is stated in Matthew 6:24. In Matthew, this precedes a section explaining that, as believers, we should not worry about the material things of this world, but rather, “…seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). Earlier in the same passage (6:21), we are told, “For where your treasure is, there you heart will be also.” The bottom line is clear! We should not store up treasure for ourselves here on earth, because they will not last. We should store up treasures in Heaven, for they will last!

...wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.
~ Matthew 7:13b ~

But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.
~ Matthew 7:14 ~