Today I am going to talk about stewardship – which contrary to popular belief - is not church fundraising. Stewardship is the right, proper and faithful use of all, that’s 100%, of the resources God has given us at our disposal, which is everything.

The audience Jesus is speaking to in chapter 16 is the disciples. In chapter 15 He was speaking to a crowd and addressed the “tax collectors and sinners and the Pharisees.” Remember the lost sheep and lost coin and also the Prodigal son? They were His target group. In 16, He is still speaking before this larger group but His target group is His disciples, the faithful followers of Jesus. And now, you and me.

While reading the Bible, Mark Twain once quipped, “It is not the parts of the Scripture that I don't understand that bother me. It's the parts that I do understand.” Regarding today’s Gospel we might re-phrase Twain to say, “It’s not what it’s saying that bothers me, it’s what I THINK it’s saying that does!”

This parable is considered by most to be Jesus most difficult parable to understand. I think what makes it difficult for most folks is the general assumption or misunderstanding that Jesus is commending this guy for being dishonest. Jesus is not and I hope to show that by the end so stay with me.

If that’s not what Jesus is doing, what Jesus is doing is telling His disciples about the importance of the right and faithful use of worldly good and wealth for the kingdom of God. Listen the, with that in mind.

In the parable, a rich man has a steward, an administrator or business manager over his estate and business dealings. The rich man believes that the steward is squandering his property. Same word used of the younger son in the Prodigal Son parable who squanders and wastes his inheritance. So the rich man says, “*give me an accounting of your management*” – then you’re fired.

Apparently, the owner does not suspect the steward of being consciously dishonest because he did not have him arrested for deceit or theft. The owner simply believes him to be inept or irresponsible or possibly extravagant in his management so he’s relieving him of his duties.

So the steward is up the proverbial creek. He knows he can’t withstand hard labor and he’s too proud or ashamed to beg. But he’s clever and cunning so he makes a plan. He’s going to make friends with the rich man’s debtors so they will be beholden to him and help him out after he’s fired. In looking out for himself he moves into the realm of being dishonest and deceitful.

The dishonest steward, which Jesus reaffirms as dishonest all through the parable, had the debtors destroy the old bills and write new ones. In doing so, he leaves no evidence of any criminal conduct.

This is where people misunderstand the parable. The rich man, not Jesus, commends the dishonest steward because he acted shrewdly. He is not commending his dishonesty and fraud but rather his shrewdness for acting with “worldly wisdom” as one commentator puts it, toward the debtors.

Jesus’ purpose for this parable, as seen in verse 8, (quote) “is to call attention to the wise and ‘diplomatic’ manner in which the worldlings generally act towards their fellow-men in order to achieve their own selfish aims. In contrast with the diplomatic, clever conduct of such people, those who are members of the kingdom of light too often act unwisely and undiplomatically towards others. Instead of behaving in such a manner that they bind others to themselves, they act so that people are unnecessarily repulsed – like the Pharisees who by their attitude of self-righteousness and self-exaltation repel the publicans and sinners instead of attracting them and making them willing to receive their teachings.”

Throughout the parable, Jesus condemned the steward as unjust and dishonest and thus never recommends his dishonest methods. What He commends, through the rich man’s words, is the wisdom he uses in making friends and reaching his self-serving goals through worldly goods.

Jesus thus exhorts His followers to exercise similar wisdom in securing their goals. Their goals, however, as children of the light would be seen as securing eternal habitations with God in the kingdom rather than temporal security and comfort. So, they render service in self for God rather than self for mammon. In contrast to the “worldly” manager, they achieve their goal through faithful stewardship of material possessions and money, i.e. “the unrighteous mammon.”

An over simple translation boils down to this: Use your possessions and money wisely and faithfully for the kingdom of God. Buy or gain favor for God in the eyes of others by using your material possessions and money to help them, *so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes*.

Read that last line as, “Hey! There’s the guy that helped me out! Welcome!”

Jesus ends the teaching with, *No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*

Who owns you? God or possessions and money? Which one will you truly serve?

AMEN