

New Life Stewardship in Four T's

- ‡ Time (vv.1-2)
- ‡ Talent (vv.3-4)
- ‡ Treasure (vv.5-9)
- ‡ Testimony (vv.10-13)

In the name of Jesus, our Lord and Master, dear fellow managers of God's possessions:

One of our Seminary professors pointed out that the guy in this parable comes around every three years and he's never welcome.¹ He's an irritating hombre no boss could stand to keep around. He'd be sued out of his severance package. And yet Jesus points to him as an example for us church people? Hypocrisy wants to hide in us like a deadly virus. That's why we've confessed all our sins and received again God's full and free forgiveness. Now we can look honestly at **New Life Stewardship in Four T's** – even if we need to pray, “Lord, make me more like people who never go to church!” Some of Jesus' toughest sermons are also the most profitable. So true of His story about “The Shrewd Manager.”

‡ Time (vv.1-2)

How quickly things can turn around. Whistling to work in the morning...everything's fine...then right before lunch the boss ruins your day. Bad enough to get fired, but what if this were true? You're accused of wasting your boss' *possessions*? He's glaring at you: “**What is this that I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you can no longer be manager.**” (EHV²)

Managers in those days were more like a personal assistant who handles everything the boss would rather not. Embezzlement seems likely here. But what does that have to do with us? Here's one of the hardest concepts for us to grasp: Everything we have comes from God and belongs to God. How many earthquakes, wild fires, hurricanes and tornadoes does it take to convince us that all our life's work can be scattered to the winds in a moment. Who controls the wind? In a way we're worse than this irritating manager because we call all God's stuff *mine!* He at least knows the owner.

He puts us to shame by wasting no **Time**. We keep pretending we can always worship when we have more time – as if once a week is too much **Time** for God. Or witness to our neighbor some other **Time**. Or accept responsibility in God's house if there's **Time** next year. How quickly comes our last breath! But picture this fired manager running to his computer, pulling up bills on all his master's debtors while texting them to meet. Then he gets their signature on bills they reduce as he instructs! That's good?

‡ Talent (vv.3-4)

Jesus, I'm not sure I like this! But He's not finished. Most of us sell ourselves short when it comes to God. You might FaceBook your life like it's the greatest. Anyone ever pad their resume? But when needs come up that might be filled by you, how easy it is to say, “That's not my **Talent**.” Or, “I'm stepping aside for someone else,” but then not look for ways to use the **Talent** God has given you.

The shrewd manager says, “It's not my **Talent** to dig. It's not my **Talent** to beg.” But notice he's not giving up and walking away. He thinks about it...then, “**I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from my position as manager, people will receive me into their houses.**” Is he just dreaming? No! He's taking stock of the resources at his disposal to use what he has. Are we using all our **Talent**?

¹ Professor Richard Gurgel, *Grow in Grace Notes*: <https://www.wls.wels.net/lord-make-me-more-like-the-unbelievers/>

² EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

‡ Treasure (vv.5-9)

Our Lord Jesus is not telling us to be dishonest. He literally calls the man “unrighteous.” *“All unrighteousness is sin.”* (1 John 5:17 NIV84) Yet *he acted shrewdly*. He was sensible about what money could do even if it wasn’t his. But isn’t that dishonest with someone else’s money?

Whose money are we really using? “Pastor, I earned it.” True and good, but who supplied you with the job? Who gives you your health to work? Your mind to solve problems? Your practical horse sense to manage difficult situations? Once again the shrewd manager is putting us to shame because we all want to believe, “What’s mine is mine.” While it all belongs to God, we make an idol of it.

Jesus the skillful surgeon exposes our sin of idolatry: *“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the children of the light are. I tell you, make friends for yourselves with unrighteous mammon, so that when it runs out, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings.”*

Mammon was the name of an idol representing all the riches above and beyond what someone needs. The people who never go to church are like this shrewd manager because they serve their idol with undivided devotion. With barely ever a guilty thought they energetically pursue whatever is above and beyond what they need – as if their whole life is built on earthly **Treasure**.

But what about us? Too often we act as if we can serve both God and *Mammon*, as if we’ll never be called into the office to face our Lord and Master for all his **Time** and **Talent** and **Treasure** wasted.

‡ Testimony (vv.10-13)

So is Jesus telling us to stay away like the unbelievers? No, He’s winning us over to undivided devotion to God. Each week He calls us into God’s house. Every service we’re drawn to the cross: *“How well you know my griefs and fears, Your grace abused, my misspent years: So now to you with contrite tears, Christ crucified I come.”* (CW 387:2) But before we could even begin to confess a tiny fraction of the ways we’ve wasted God’s goods and worshiped *Mammon*, our heavenly Father interrupts us with another report. It’s about His faithful Son. Jesus is the only One who ever served God perfectly with undivided devotion. Christ alone stayed focused on His mission to save our souls from eternal torment. Not even His family or the government could turn Him away. Here in Luke our Lord Jesus is actually on His *Resolute Journey to the Cross* (9:51 – 19:44) And here’s the **Testimony** from God through His witnesses: *“The blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.”* (1 John 1:7) That surely includes every time our hearts have been drawn away to serve money, things and people instead of God.

God’s greatest gift is the forgiveness of all our sins. How can you put a price tag on the peace of God which surpasses all understanding? But then God wraps us up in His mission with another awesome gift. God gives us this same saving **Testimony** to share with others. It’s *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”* (Ephesians 6:17) And it is *“the glory of all his saints”* to use it. (Psalm 149:6–9)

You see, that moment is near when the holy angels will come to carry you home to heaven – all because Jesus lived and died and lives again for you. Their gentle power and friendliness will let you feel they come as friends. To a realm beyond this physical world they will wing their way with you...through the pearly gates of glory where happiness can be felt in every gentle breeze. Your final judgment? Look! Your loving Lord Jesus turns to you with the kindest eyes you’ve ever seen and a delighted smile to welcome you home. That bear hug just for you will last forever. Then He whispers, “Look around.” And there are all the smiling faces of parents you told about Jesus, friends and relatives you kept praying for, foreigners who heard the Word on distant shores because you took Jesus at His Word. You resolved again in grace to worship God alone and make that worldly *Mammon* serve God’s good purpose in mission offerings and your tithes of **Time** and **Talent** and **Treasure**. Your life and lips give your **Testimony**. And their smiling faces and praises to God for you will be rich **Testimony** to God’s grace in your life. *“All things are yours”* (1 Corinthians 3:21) because the God who owns everything is your God. You’re not fired. You’re fired up for **New Life Stewardship in Four T’s**. Glory be to Jesus! Amen.