



21<sup>st</sup> September 2025

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

# Stewardship Sunday

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ, what a joy that we can come together to worship, as we all continue our life journey, celebrating today the 15<sup>TH</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

I pray, that today's message will lift all our spirits, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.*

*Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings. Amen.*

Well, to be perfectly honest with you all, what a challenge the gospel reading set down for today was for me! I mean whatever is going on in this strange parable of the dishonest manager?

Also, why is this story not mentioned in any of the other Gospel's?

Whichever way you read it, it is confusing. Luke has obviously decided that it is about attachment to wealth, and he has put it with a couple of other stories about the dangers of money.

Do we get a picture in our mind of Luke, maybe sitting at a table, with a stack of papers in front of him, that he has collected over the months/years from eye witness accounts, plus notes from his journeys with St Paul & material he has used from St Mark's gospel.

We can imagine, Luke has got the overall structure of his book sorted, and he knows where all the main stories and sayings fit, but now he is left with his file possibly named 'miscellaneous'. 'What do I do with these?' he asks himself. "The old chap who told me the story said he'd been there when Jesus had told it. But I can't help thinking that he must have missed some of it, or wandered off before the end. Jesus can't have told it like this!

That is certainly the feel of this story. It reads like something that has been wrongly remembered, or had its punchline forgotten, or something. Perhaps the original audience, even, didn't understand it.

Several of Jesus' parables were clearly funny in their original context, but have been retold by pious people who believe that religion and laughter have nothing to do with each other. Have we known people like this?

If we read this story as ironic and unsettling, it begins to make a bit more sense.

For one thing, the audience never quite know where their sympathies are supposed to lie! As the story opens, we have the rich man and his manager. The kind of people to whom Jesus addressed his stories would most naturally have identified with the manager.

Verse 1 tells us that Jesus told this story to his disciples, though later verses in the chapter (see v 14) suggest that other people were listening in. Either way, this is not an audience made up of the wealthy. Clearly, the rich man owns a lot of properties and has put a manager in charge of this one.



The rich man himself doesn't seem to live locally, and isn't known to his debtors and tenants. For them, the real source of power, day to day, is the manager. There is also a slight suggestion in verse 1 that the charges brought against the manager are malicious, and may prove untrue!

So, the audience settle down to dislike the absentee landlord and feel sorry for the manager.

But then, lo & behold, the manager turns out to be a crook after all! Whether or not he has done anything wrong before, he now sets out to swindle his master.

What is his role in the story now?

Perhaps he is a kind of comic villain, who still keeps the sympathy of the audience, like many of the movies that were written to entertain us!

We can see his weaknesses, but they are so like our own that we can't help liking him. Perhaps the audience accepts a general culture in which you do cheat a bit, if the person you are cheating is very rich and not really part of your community. It might be a bit like the assumptions in certain circles (though not among the readers of this book, I'm sure) that it really isn't immoral not to pay all taxes you should, if you can get away with it!

But the story takes another twist when the master acts out of character. If the story is to follow the normal pattern, either the master never finds out, or he finds out and is furious and the manager must be punished or repent and be reconciled. But here the master congratulates the manager for acting sensibly!

What kind of an ending to the story is that? Where's the moral?

Jesus does tell other stories that would seem to question whether the manager had really acted wisely.

Could it be significant that this story immediately follows the story of the Prodigal Son?

When he had spent all his money, where the grateful friends to take him into their homes? Is the kind of gratitude that the manager is banking on in the master's debtors really so reliable?

Suddenly the story isn't just amusing and abstract, but a direct and personal, with the unmistakable ring of Jesus' voice behind it!

Who or what are we actually relying on?

Take a long hard look at ourselves,

- the things we find funny,
- the things that we think are wrong and
- the things that don't matter much,
- where our natural sympathies lie,
- what makes us feel secure or insecure,
- who would we turn to in times of trouble?

Decision time says Jesus! **Amen!**