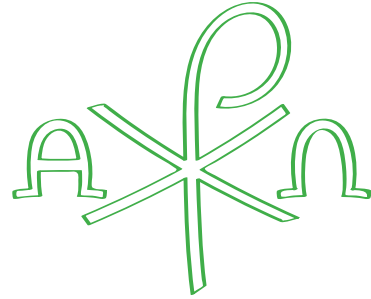


THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Marcus Baikie



Luke 16:1-9 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused Luke, the physician, to write the words of this Gospel around AD 55-60. This text, which is not specifically called a parable, is part of a larger teaching discourse, which consists mostly of parables. It follows immediately after the three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son in Luke 15. These words are spoken during the period of Jesus' travel toward Jerusalem and the cross (see Luke 9:51).

¹ [Jesus] also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions.

- Though this parable follows immediately after the three parables of Luke 15, the audience is different. In Luke 15, Jesus tells the parables to the Pharisees and scribes who grumbled that Jesus received sinners and ate with them. In Luke 16, Jesus tells this parable specifically to His disciples. However, verse 14 tells us that the Pharisees were still listening in.
- The word translated "manager" is often translated "steward". Jesus uses this word in Luke 12:42, "And the Lord said, 'Who then is the faithful and wise *manager*, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.'" A manager had authority over his master's household to administer the master's possessions as he saw fit.
- This text is linked to the texts that precede and follow it. First, the word "wasting" is used also in Luke 15:13; the manager of this story wasted his master's possessions, just like the prodigal son had wasted ("squandered") his father's possessions.

Second, the phrase "there was a rich man" begins the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

² And he called him and said to him, "What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager."

- Like the LORD God to Adam after the Fall (Genesis 3:11), the rich man gives his manager an opportunity to confess his fault. This gives some indication as to the master's character: rather than casting his wasteful manager into prison, he simply terminates his position.
- Therefore when we consider this story from the perspective of the master, it becomes a lesson on mercy, rather than dishonesty. (See also the previous Parable of the Prodigal Son, which in many ways is better understood as the Parable of the Forgiving Father).

³ And the manager said to himself, "What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.

- Like the prodigal son, the dishonest manager has hit rock bottom. There is nothing he can do to redeem his situation.

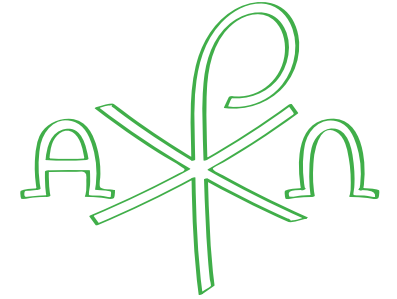
⁴ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.'

- The usual courses of actions in such a time would be to make excuses or to blame the master or others (again, consider Adam and Eve's responses after their sin in Genesis 3). The manager does something totally unexpected, however.

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- The usual courses of actions in such a time would be to make excuses or to blame the master or others (again, consider Adam and Eve's responses after their sin in Genesis 3). The manager does something totally unexpected, however.

⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

- He calls the master's debtors to him one by one in order that no one would be able to pick up on his scheme. He does not go to them; rather he calls them to himself.

⁶ He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷ Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'

- The measure of oil is a "bath", approximately eight to nine gallons. The measure of wheat is a "kor", possibly as large as ten bushels. Thus both the amount owed and the amounts forgiven were significant. In both cases, the amount was worth five hundred denarii (see Just, *Luke* 9:51-24:53, 611).

- The manager's shrewdness, for which he will be commended, is apparent. He does not make the changes in his own hand, lest his scheme be discovered. Nor does he allow the debtors to take time to ponder this generosity. He urges them to write the changes in their own handwriting quickly, before his termination is finalized.

- "The man knew that he had no way of escape. He had no illusions. He knew that he was going to be out on his own. Therefore he saw the consequences and acted with dispatch and resolution. But people who want to be Christians sometimes do just the opposite. They harbor the illusion that this is not so important and that everything will come out right in the end. And so they procrastinate. They do not deduce the consequence that their salvation is a matter of dead seriousness and that they must reckon with God in everything above all." (Giertz, *Preaching from the Whole Bible*, 88-89)

⁸ The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

- Literally, "the manager of unrighteousness." This is key, as the next verse reminds us that we are all managers of unrighteous wealth in this fallen world.
- The master is now stuck because of his manager's actions. If he corrects the manager's dishonesty, his reputation would be destroyed in the community. If he allows the manager's actions to stand, he has suffered a great financial loss (see above), but he also is honored in the community as a good and generous man.

- "Shrewdness" may also be translated "prudence". This refers to the manager's awareness of his hopeless situation and his use of his manager's resources in hope of his mercy.

- Jesus admonishes us to display the same kind of prudence in regards to heavenly things as the unbeliever has in regards to unrighteous wealth: "People will go ten miles in pursuit of a gulden, a groschen, or even a penny, though these are uncertain. Yet for the soul's salvation and blessedness they can hardly be bothered to cross the street, hear God's Word, receive the Holy Sacrament, and obtain forgiveness of sins, though these are certain." (Spangenberg, *The Christian Year of Grace*, 278)

⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."

- Because this story is so challenging, this verse serves to interpret it for us. The manager is not being praised for his illegal activities. Rather, he serves as an example of how one may use unrighteous wealth to make friends for oneself.
- We are called as managers to use what has been given to us to help and support our neighbors in need. By aiding them with our financial resources, we make friends of them. But rather than being received into their houses, as the manager had hoped, we will be received into the eternal dwellings of our heavenly Father on the day when unrighteous wealth fails, that is, death.

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