



“Breaking Bad”

...the parable of the shrewd steward.

**by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Luke 16:1 He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. 2 "So he called him and said to him, 'What is

this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' 3 "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 'I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' 5 "So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So 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?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' 8 "So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. 9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. 10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. 11 "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 "And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? 13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." 14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. 15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

When high school chemistry teacher Walter White is diagnosed with Stage III cancer and given only two years to live, he decides he has nothing to lose. He lives with his teenage son, who has cerebral palsy, and his wife, in New Mexico. Determined to ensure that his family will have a secure future, Walt inexplicably and uncharacteristically embarks on a career of drugs and crime. He proves to be remarkably proficient in this new world as he begins manufacturing and selling methamphetamine with one of his former students. The series, “Breaking Bad” tracks the impact of an extreme crisis upon a regular, hard working man, and explores how a ‘nothing to lose’ situation can affect his morality and compel him to be and do what under normal conditions he would never be or do.

Travel back in time some 2000 years before the onset of TV, and Jesus told a story similar to that of “Breaking Bad.” Jesus tells a story about a man who, like Walter White, was backed into a corner and in desperate straits he moved also into ‘crisis mode’ and ultimately acted out in a way that under normal circumstances he never would have. Having witnessed many such personal crisis in the lives of people around me...both those I know and those I do not, I am left to wonder about such things. What does it take to get a man’s attention? What does it take to bring a man to the brink of his comfortable existence and perhaps nudge him over? Just where is a man’s breaking point?

Certainly, this story is one of those biblical stories where we are apt to be left scratching our heads. On the surface we could easily step back in a bit of incredulous disbelief. I mean really; *does this story sound right to you? I think somethings wrong here.* And further...**JESUS** said this? Critical once again is the context of what Jesus has been saying and what is going on around him. Jesus had been speaking about things that were lost, and about people who were coming to an epiphany in their lives and realization of a stark reality which had been previously ignored or previously slighted in personal priority. Only when their back was against the wall did we see the real them...did we see their real heart...did the truth rise to the surface, into the public display of their lives. Truly we can be such a pitifully species when it comes to such a picture of our living!

The man in our story was going to lose his job. We don't have any details as to the cause, nor are they necessary to the point of the story. But evidently he had not done a good job with his position...in his stewardship, and had in fact apparently squandered the resources of his master. He had failed to steward well that which was put in his charge. It doesn't really matter the details...whether it was a talent, a coin, an inheritance, a financial standing, a lamb, or an influence upon the world at large. All of it was given and has been given to us to steward over...to care for and invest for 'king and kingdom.' None of it is ours to keep. None of it will last. It is merely a loan for the time we are here on this planet. What we do with it says everything about us. Our character, our passions, our motivations and our allegiances.

The man...once again "backed into a corner," devised a plan of survival. The back story, which is not critical to the point of the message, is often understood as follows: In 'old school' Judaism, the OT scriptures prohibited a Jew to charge another Jew interest. But as always is this case it seems, people had devised ways around the rules. If the charge was 80 bushels of wheat, the 'man' would simply send a bill for 100 bushels and it was just understood that the 20 was interest but was not so noted or verbally spoken. So it is often thought that what this steward was doing in his actions herein was cutting the interest. By doing so, he was essentially then not really *stealing* but rather cutting the fat off of a bill that was essentially illegal in its form. And further, what could the master really do? Who could he complain to?

After it all went down, the master was amazed. Oh, I don't think he is inferring that he was pleased or happy that he lost some money, but impressed at that man's ingenuity and resourcefulness. It's like being beaten in some competition where your opposition utilized a little known loophole or a marginally legal maneuver to slam home the winning point and you're left slackjawed and incredulous. Where you are not happy you lost, but still you still stand in awe with "what just happened there?" on your lips. "*That's was crazy incredible...*" That was the reaction of the master!

Because we get lost in that element of the story, we can actually miss the point of what Jesus was praising this fella concerning. And we have to know that it wasn't specifically what he did or how he did it. But it was rather the understanding that the servant had concerning his true state of being and his grasp of the reality of his situation. It was *this* that Christ spoke highly concerning. For right or wrong, Walter White understood where he stood. He had a sick son that would need lifelong assistance, he had little financial resources and he was certainly going to die. He 'got it.' There was no pretending or 'turning a blind eye.'

It was this element of the story that Jesus was trying to emphasize. ***This*** was the motivation behind the praise! Both Walter White and the man in our text knew the reality of their mortality and their part in the world. Jesus lamented that “*the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.*” What does ***that*** mean? It means that so often the people of the world are more keenly aware of reality and the world around them than Christian believers in this world. *How so?*

Well, often the people of the world seem to innately understand ...again, for good or for bad, that they have precious little time to ‘get their game on.’ They want to ‘make their million before their thirty.’ They attempt at every turn to ‘suck the marrow’ out of life because they know it is fleeting and will end. And for them, that end is *permanent*. Thus they are aggressive in business, insatiable in their passions, and hedonistic in their living. They “grab all they can get” and live with gusto. They will cheat and steal if it means achieving all of that. While we are not supportive of such dishonest methods, one must step back and acknowledge that at least they *get it*. They are going to die and this life is all there is for them so they better ‘get it on.’

And what about the Christian? Do *we* get it? Or are we lulled into a sense that “we have all the time in the world,” and perhaps a false understanding that when God says He will take care of me that that means that I will always be healthy, physically mobile, financially liquid and politically secure. That “there will always be tomorrow.” But the fact is, that is just not true. And while we may “live forever” in the eternal realm, we will not in this life and on this plan of existence. We are human and susceptible to disease, accidents, job loss, and governmental actions.

The question Jesus is asking is “why don’t we get it?” Why are we so often spiritually lethargic and unaware of the brevity of time on this planet? We too, like the steward in the story, have been so entrusted with talents, finances, gifting’s, and callings that should enflame our hearts with passionate motivation to do and to invest. And yet just as then, so many who embrace the Christian faith fail to do so. Is that what Jesus came to give us? Is that why He died to save us? So we can sleep in, be lazy, disengaged and lackadaisical in the stewardship of what we have been called to invest?

Does our salvation give us not the *real* peace of heavenly status, but rather the false peace of dreamy lethargy and hyper-Calvinistic living where nothing I do really matters because “Jesus does it all?” Are we truly stewarding what God has trustingly bestowed upon us, or squandering time and possession under the illusion that the fountain will never run dry? Like children we just show up time and time again at meal time because Daddy will surely bring home the bacon and mommy will always cook it up for us?

Are we using what God gave us? The call is to be good stewards...*caretakers* really, of what we do not own and we will not keep. For a time it has been loaned to us to invest in the kingdom of God. That’s our *job* on this planet...that is our duty, our “*reasonable service*” in light of salvation and eternal life. In the 1990’s an apparel company called “No Fear” launched a very successful marketing platform for hard-core athletic gear. The world embraced the premise! Yet in reality, we as born-again believers are the only ones who can live with ‘no fear.’ But the fact is, one must wonder if we are really living at all?

We are the ones who can ‘jump’ without fear of personal loss, because frankly for one, it’s not our stuff, and two, God has our back. We are like supermen...nothing can harm us without the express consent of our Master. Such does not imply we are to be reckless! Quite the contrary! We are to be thinking people. Smart, gutsy, strategic, and often even methodical. But we are to be bold! And we are to be constantly aware that we have precious little time to get our game on. Age and a wearing body is inevitably coming. Death is inevitably coming!

Thus we are to take care of these “temples” that house our soul. Not fanatical to the level of preoccupation, but careful in the care and maintenance so the machine keeps running so we can fulfill our mission! We are to spend our money and time and energy now while we are still breathing and we can still move without a walker. Jesus told Peter in John 21; (17-19) *“Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep. “I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don’t want to go.” Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, “Follow me.”*

Jesus, in our text, went on to elaborate further and to express the impact of this issue: *“If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people’s things, why should you be trusted with things of your own? “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”* Ironically, so many of us, will spend our lives wondering...perhaps even with a level of angst and even tacit bitterness, why we don’t get to do more, have more, and be more in the paradigm of the earthly kingdom. We are apt to blame others around us or as is often the case, blame the church and its leadership. *They will not let me...they will not give me a chance...they will not recognize my abilities.*

The premise and the cry of such folks make me bristle! How sad that they do not see that such standing is not *our* doing, but rather clearly and scripturally *theirs*. They have failed to be faithful in the small aspects and duties of their lives and calling, and thus God has not so lifted them up to a place of higher service and position. Those who have failed to care for the temple of their soul, failed to be consistent in their service, failed to embrace the responsibilities of marriage, parenting, vocation, and finances, etc. How many are wondering why they do not get a spouse, when they cannot even be faithful with their finances or even their personal hygiene? Why would God give you the position of care over one of His daughters or sons?

Such is not God’s desire for us! Nor this churches desire for you! He does not want to keep such things from you! *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”* (1 Corinthians 2:9) But for many of us, it is high time to suit up and engage. Because many of us are frankly and honestly “wasting their lives” and possessions. They are not ‘good stewards’ with what they have been given. They have ‘buried their talent’ out of fear for self and self-preservation. How would the “Master” judge you if today you stood before Him? Will you hear the words of Matthew 25:30 *“...cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* Or will you hear *“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”* Live large Christian! **Live large...**