

The Parable of the Dishonest Manager

Luke 16:1–18 includes Jesus’ teaching about the **Parable of the Unjust Steward (vv. 1–13)** and then brief teachings on the **Law, divorce, and the kingdom of God (vv. 14–18)**. At first glance, this section may feel disjointed, but it's intentionally connected—not only within itself but also to **Luke 15**, especially the **Parable of the Lost Son**.

EXPLANATION OF LUKE 16:1–18

1–13: The Parable of the Unjust Steward

A rich man hears that his steward (manager) has been wasteful, so he prepares to fire him. The steward, knowing he will lose his job, quickly reduces the debts of his master’s debtors to gain their favor and secure his future. Surprisingly, the master **commends** his shrewdness (not his dishonesty).

Key Lessons:

| Verse | Message |
|-------|---|
| 8 | The "sons of this world" are shrewder than "sons of light"—Jesus calls His followers to be wise with resources. |
| 9 | Use worldly wealth to build relationships that lead to eternal benefit (“friends who will welcome you into eternal dwellings”). |
| 10–12 | Faithfulness in little = faithfulness in much. Worldly stewardship reflects eternal trustworthiness. |
| 13 | You can’t serve both God and money (Mammon). |

Main Point:

Be **shrewd** (wise, intentional) with your **earthly possessions** in a way that reflects eternal priorities.

CONNECTION TO THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON (Luke 15:11–32)

There are **clear narrative and thematic links** between the two parables:

| Theme | Lost Son (Luke 15) | Unjust Steward (Luke 16) |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Wastefulness | The younger son “ <i>squandered his wealth</i> ” (15:13) | The steward was accused of “ <i>wasting possessions</i> ” (16:1) |
| Facing consequences | The son ends up in poverty and must act | The steward faces job loss and must act |
| Sudden crisis | Famine hits after the son has spent all | Master calls the steward to account |
| Clever response | The son decides to return home and appeal to the father's mercy | The steward reduces debts to secure future favors |
| Commendation/Mercy | The father <i>receives and restores</i> the son | The master <i>commends</i> the steward's shrewdness |
| Concern for future security | Son: “I will perish with hunger” (15:17) | Steward: “I am not strong enough to dig...” (16:3) |

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Key Connection:

Both parables **deal with the use or misuse of resources**, and both characters **act decisively** when their situations become desperate. However, **the prodigal son's story ends in mercy**, while the **steward's story ends in commendation for shrewdness**.

Jesus seems to **transition from celebrating God's mercy (ch. 15) to challenging His followers to wisely respond to that mercy**—by using their time, wealth, and influence with eternal priorities in mind.

14–18: Teachings on Money, Law, and the Kingdom

Jesus turns to the Pharisees, who were **“lovers of money”** (v. 14), and rebukes them.

| Verse | Teaching |
|-------|---|
| 14–15 | God sees beyond outward appearances to the heart. What people admire (wealth/status) may be detestable to God. |
| 16 | The Law and the Prophets were until John. Since then, the good news of the kingdom is preached—pressing in is urgent. |
| 17 | The Law is still valid; God's standards are not abolished. |
| 18 | A teaching on divorce—reinforcing that the kingdom ethic has high standards for relational faithfulness. |

Connection to Prior Verses:

- These verses address **the Pharisees' love of money, legalism, and status**.
- Their values are **in contrast to the kingdom values** displayed in the prodigal son (grace) and the shrewd steward (wisdom in preparation for judgment).

SUMMARY

| Section | Summary | Connection |
|---------------|--|--|
| Luke 16:1–13 | The unjust steward is commended for shrewdly using money to prepare for the future. | Like the prodigal son, he acts decisively in crisis. Jesus urges kingdom-minded use of wealth. |
| Luke 16:14–18 | Jesus confronts the Pharisees' love of money and reaffirms the Law's integrity. | Contrast between worldly values (money, appearances) and God's values (faithfulness, truth). |

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To be **shrewd in preparing for eternity** with how we use money today means to **use temporary, earthly resources in ways that produce eternal, spiritual results**. Jesus' point in the **Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–13)** is not to encourage dishonesty but to **commend wisdom, foresight, and urgency** in light of coming judgment.

Here's a breakdown of what that kind of shrewdness looks like from a biblical standpoint:



What Does "Shrewd" Mean in This Context?

In Greek, the word for shrewd (φρονίμως *phronimōs*) means:

- **Wise**
- **Prudent**
- **Thoughtful**
- **Farsighted**

It carries the idea of being **strategic** and **deliberate**, especially with limited time and resources.



How to Be Shrewd with Money for Eternal Purposes

| Principle | What It Means | Supporting Scripture |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Invest in People, Not Possessions | Use money to build relationships, meet needs, and support ministry that leads people toward Christ. | Luke 16:9 – “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth...” |
| 2. Give Generously and Sacrificially | Use money to support the poor, the church, and gospel work. Eternal reward outweighs earthly security. | Matthew 6:20 – “Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...” |
| 3. Use Wealth to Serve, Not Rule | Money is a tool, not a master. Let it serve God's purposes, not your own greed or comfort. | Luke 16:13 – “You cannot serve both God and money.” |
| 4. Live with an Eternal Perspective | Make financial decisions (spending, saving, giving) that reflect your belief in eternal life, not just the present. | 2 Corinthians 4:18 – “What is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” |
| 5. Be Faithful with What You Have | Whether you have little or much, use it in a way that honors God's kingdom. | Luke 16:10 – “He who is faithful in little is faithful in much...” |
| 6. Prepare Now for Future Accountability | Like the steward, we will all give an account. Prepare now by stewarding money with God's purposes in mind. | Romans 14:12 – “Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.” |



In Summary:

To be shrewd means to:

- **Think ahead** with an eternal mindset
- **Leverage what is temporary (money)** for what is eternal (souls, relationships, God's kingdom)
- **Act wisely and urgently** knowing our time and resources are limited

Or as one theologian put it:

“Jesus is not praising the steward's dishonesty but his foresight. He used his present position to prepare for his future. So should we.”

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Luke 16:16–18 can feel like a sudden shift in topic, but these verses are actually **a continuation of Jesus’ response to the Pharisees** (see v.14), and they tie into the broader theme of **God’s kingdom, the Law, and integrity**—including how we handle money, relationships, and righteousness. Let’s look at it verse by verse:

Luke 16:16-18 (ESV)

16 “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.”

17 “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.”

18 “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

VERSE-BY-VERSE EXPLANATION

Verse 16: “The Law and the Prophets were until John...”

Meaning:

- “The Law and the Prophets” refers to the Old Testament—the revelation of God’s will up until **John the Baptist**.
- With John came a transition: **the kingdom of God began to be preached** openly through him and now through Jesus.
- The phrase “**everyone forces his way into it**” can also be translated:
 - “*Everyone is urged into it with force*” or
 - “*Everyone is striving to enter it*” (cf. Luke 13:24).

Interpretation:

- The arrival of Jesus marks a **new era**—not a replacement of the Law, but a fulfillment and intensification of it.
- People are responding passionately and urgently, unlike the Pharisees who clung to status quo religion and legalism.

Verse 17: “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away...”

Meaning:

- Jesus affirms that even though a new era has come, **God’s Law hasn’t been abolished**.
- The Law still stands—it hasn’t lost its authority or moral weight.
- “One dot” refers to the **smallest stroke in the Hebrew alphabet** (like a serif); nothing in God’s Word is insignificant or disposable.

Connection:

- Jesus anticipates people misinterpreting His teaching: “If grace and the kingdom are here, does the Law not matter anymore?”
- He answers: **No—God’s standards are still intact**.

Verse 18: “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery...”

Meaning:

- This seems abrupt, but it’s an **example** of how the **Pharisees twisted the Law**.
- Many Pharisees allowed **easy, unjustified divorce**, often for selfish reasons (see also Matthew 19:3–9).
- Jesus clarifies that **God’s original intent for marriage is lifelong faithfulness**, and easy divorce is a violation of that.

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Why include this here?

- Jesus is showing that **true righteousness** exceeds legal loopholes.
- He uses **marriage** as a test case for **lawkeeping with integrity**—unlike the Pharisees, who used the Law to justify sin.
- Just as with money (vv. 10–13), the **heart motive** matters more than legal correctness.



BIG THEMES IN THESE VERSES

| Theme | Explanation |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Transition of Covenants | John marks the shift from the Old Covenant (Law & Prophets) to the New Covenant (Kingdom through Christ). |
| Continuity of God's Standards | The Law isn't abolished but fulfilled in Christ (cf. Matthew 5:17); God's moral demands remain. |
| Integrity over Loopholes | Jesus exposes how the Pharisees <i>appeared righteous</i> but manipulated the Law (especially on money and marriage). |
| Urgency of the Kingdom | People are <i>pressing in</i> to enter the kingdom—it demands a response. |



SUMMARY

Jesus is challenging the Pharisees' hypocrisy. He's saying:

- The kingdom of God has arrived, and people are responding with urgency.
- The Law hasn't disappeared—its moral authority stands.
- But you (Pharisees) **misuse the Law** to justify greed and broken relationships (like easy divorce).
- True righteousness demands **heart obedience**, not external compliance.

The phrase in **Luke 16:16**—

“Everyone forces his way into it” (ESV)

vs.

“Everyone is urgently invited to enter it” (CSB)—

are **not exactly the same**, but they are **two possible interpretations of the same Greek phrase**, and both have solid linguistic and contextual support.



GREEK TEXT:

πᾶς εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται

pas eis autēn biazetai

– literally: “everyone into it is being violent” or “pressing with force”

- **biazetai** is a passive or middle voice of **βιάζομαι (biazomai)** – “to force,” “to press,” “to seize violently,” or “to push one's way in.”

This verb is only used **twice** in the New Testament:

1. **Luke 16:16**
2. **Matthew 11:12:**

“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men seize it by force.” (ESV)

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TWO INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS:



Active / Middle Voice Interpretation – "Everyone forces his way into it"

- This reads the verb as **middle voice** (the subject acts on or for themselves).
- Meaning: people are **striving, pushing, or urgently forcing their way** into the kingdom.
- Suggests **intensity, eagerness**, and **costly pursuit**—a parallel to **Luke 13:24**:
"Strive to enter through the narrow door..."
- Also echoes **Matthew 11:12**'s idea of the kingdom being so desirable that people go to great lengths to get in.



Passive Interpretation – "Everyone is urgently invited"

- Some take it as **divine action upon people**: people are being **urged, compelled, or drawn** into the kingdom.
- This leans more on the **gracious initiative of God**, aligning with Luke's emphasis on **God seeking the lost** (Luke 15).
- CSB reflects this interpretation: "Everyone is urgently invited to enter it."



ARE THEY THE SAME?

| Comparison | "Forces his way in" | "Urgently invited" |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Emphasis | The human response: active striving | The divine call: urgent invitation |
| Tone | Aggressive, eager pursuit | Gracious, compelling offer |
| View of entering | Costly, determined effort | Open, compelling appeal |
| Biblical echoes | Luke 13:24; Matt. 11:12 | Luke 14:23 (parable of the banquet) |

➔ Not the same, but **complementary truths**:

- One sees the kingdom as **so valuable that people strive** to enter it at all costs.
- The other sees the kingdom as **so gracious that God urgently invites all to come**.



Theological Balance:

Both aspects reflect **Jesus' kingdom message**:

- The kingdom **demands urgent, personal response** (Luke 13:24).
- The kingdom is also **offered with open arms** to sinners, outcasts, and the lost (Luke 15).



Summary:

| Translation | Meaning | Valid? |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| ESV: "forces his way in" | Emphasizes intense personal striving | ✅ Yes, supported by Greek and context |
| CSB: "urgently invited" | Emphasizes God's urgent appeal | ✅ Yes, plausible and contextually rich |

Both are legitimate translations rooted in the same Greek word **βιάζεται**, each offering a different **angle on the urgency and value of entering the kingdom**.

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In **Luke 16:9** and **Luke 16:11**, the Greek word used for **money** is:
μαμωνᾶς (mamōnas) — transliterated as **Mammon**



Greek Word: μαμωνᾶς (mamōnas)



Meaning:

- Refers to **wealth, riches, or money**, often with a **negative or morally loaded tone**.
- In Luke 16:9 and 16:11, it's called “**unrighteous mammon**” (Greek: τοῦ μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας) — literally, “Mammon of unrighteousness” or “unjust wealth.”



Origins and Background:

- **Aramaic** in origin: likely from **Māmōnā**, meaning “wealth” or “that in which one trusts.”
- The word became **personified** in Jewish and early Christian usage as a kind of **spiritual force or idol**—“**Mammon**” with a capital **M**.
- By the time of Jesus, **Mammon** was often viewed not just as wealth, but as a **rival allegiance to God**.



Where It's Used in Luke 16:

| Verse | Greek Phrase | Translation |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Luke 16:9 | μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας | “unrighteous wealth” or “worldly wealth” |
| Luke 16:11 | ἐν τῷ ἀδίκῳ μαμωνᾶ | “unrighteous Mammon” |
| Luke 16:13 | οὐ δύνασθε θεῷ δουλεῦν καὶ μαμωνᾶ | “You cannot serve God and Mammon” |



Theological Implication:

Jesus is not just talking about “money” in a neutral sense. He’s warning against **Mammon as a competing master**, a **rival to God** that demands loyalty (v.13).

This is why He says:

“You cannot serve both God and Mammon.”

The personified nature of **Mammon** frames money as something that can **enslave, corrupt, or become an idol**—if not handled with shrewdness and submission to God’s kingdom values.

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αμωνάς (*mamōnas*) can mean **possessions**, but with important nuance.

While its core meaning is **wealth or money**, in biblical and historical usage it can refer more broadly to **material possessions**, especially those that can be:

- **trusted in** (as a false source of security),
- **accumulated**, and
- **used for selfish or unrighteous purposes**.



Breakdown: Does “Mammon” mean *possessions*?

| Aspect | Explanation |
|--|---|
| Literal meaning | Originally from Aramaic <i>māmōnā</i> = wealth, riches, or that which one trusts in |
| Expanded meaning | Includes money, property, possessions , and all worldly resources |
| Biblical usage (e.g., Luke 16:9,11,13) | Refers to material wealth , including money and the stuff it buys or controls |
| Figurative meaning | Becomes a rival master (Luke 16:13), a personification of worldly gain that tempts us to misplace our trust |



Examples Where Mammon = Possessions

- **Luke 16:9** –
“Make friends for yourselves by means of **unrighteous mammon**, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”
Jesus is clearly referring not only to **cash** but to all **material resources** at your disposal.
- **Matthew 6:24** –
“You cannot serve both God and **Mammon**.”
Again, it's not just coins—it's anything you treat as your **functional security** or **object of trust**, including **possessions, status, and property**.



Summary:

| Term | Includes |
|----------------|--|
| Mammon | Money, property, material possessions, and anything that reflects worldly wealth and security |
| Meaning | Not neutral—implies wealth that competes with trust in God |



In Simple Terms:

Mammon = anything material we trust in or prioritize over God, including money, possessions, and the lifestyle they provide.

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There is a **strong and compelling case** that in the **Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus** (Luke 16:19–31), **Jesus may be indirectly referring to Caiaphas and the high priestly family of Annas**, including his five sons.

While the parable does not name Caiaphas directly, several **clues within the text, historical background, and narrative context** strongly suggest that Jesus may have **intentionally crafted this parable as a veiled critique** of the high priestly class.



CLUES THAT POINT TO CAIAPHAS OR THE PRIESTLY FAMILY

1. “He had five brothers” (Luke 16:28)

“I have five brothers—let him warn them...”

- This is **very specific** and unusual in parables, which are typically more general.
- **Annas had five sons** who became high priests (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9.1).
- The **Rich Man** could symbolize **Caiaphas**, son-in-law of Annas—making the “five brothers” a potential reference to Annas’ sons (Caiaphas’ brothers-in-law).
- All of them were part of a **powerful priestly dynasty** that rejected Jesus.

2. The Rich Man’s Clothing: Purple and Fine Linen (v.19)

- Purple and fine linen were the garments of the **high priest** (cf. Exodus 28:5, Leviticus 16:4).
- This is not typical of generic wealthy people—it points directly to **temple aristocracy**.
- The language subtly evokes **Levitical priestly imagery**.

3. The Rich Man’s House and Gate (v.20)

- The **rich man has a gate**, and **Lazarus lies outside**.
- The temple was surrounded by **literal gates**, and the priests controlled who had access.
- Lazarus (representing the poor, sick, and outcast) is **excluded**—symbolizing how the religious elite **excluded the marginalized** from God’s kingdom (cf. Luke 14:13–21; Matthew 23:13).

4. “They have Moses and the Prophets...” (v.29)

- The rich man pleads for Lazarus to warn his brothers, but Abraham replies: “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.”
- This mirrors **Jesus’ conflict with the religious leaders**—they **had the Law**, but **refused to believe** the prophetic witness pointing to Him.
- The phrase “Moses and the Prophets” was often used by Jesus to confront **Pharisees and priests** who claimed to uphold the Law but **denied its true fulfillment** (Luke 24:27; John 5:45–47).

5. “If someone rises from the dead...” (v.31)

“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

- This is an **eerie prophetic preview**:
 - **Jesus Himself** will rise from the dead.
 - The **high priestly family**, led by **Caiaphas**, will **refuse to believe** it and actively suppress it (see Matthew 28:11–15).
 - Also possible reference to **Lazarus of Bethany**, whom Jesus raised in John 11—after which the chief priests plotted to kill both Jesus *and* Lazarus (John 11:47–53; 12:10–11).

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INTERPRETIVE SUMMARY

| Parable Element | Possible Real-Life Referent |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Rich Man | Caiaphas, high priest |
| Five Brothers | Sons of Annas (Caiaphas' in-laws) |
| Purple and fine linen | High priestly garments |
| Banqueting daily | Temple wealth, priestly privilege |
| Lazarus | The poor, excluded righteous (maybe even echo of Lazarus of Bethany) |
| Abraham's Bosom | True covenant inheritance—not controlled by Temple elite |
| Refusal to believe resurrection | Caiaphas & priests rejecting Jesus (and Lazarus) even after miracles/resurrection |



Conclusion

Jesus appears to be using this parable to:

- Expose the **corruption and spiritual blindness** of the **high priestly family**.
- Warn them (and all who follow them) of **coming judgment**.
- Announce that **resurrection will not convince** those whose hearts are already hardened.

While we can't prove absolutely that Caiaphas is the Rich Man, the **context, symbolism, and historical alignment** make it a **highly plausible and intentional allusion**.