

The list of richest Americans came out this week. I suppose it's expected that none of our names were on it. The people on that list were willing to take huge risks. But huge risks can bring huge rewards. Imagine what had to be done to make 1st place kind of money. The action that had to be taken, the money that had to be invested, and the smarts to make it all work. A person like that could be considered shrewd.

Far larger are the people more at home on a list of conservative investors. Nothing wrong with a savings account, an IRA, or a money market account. Could even go more conservative than that and stuff cash under a mattress for safe keeping. Someone like that could also be called shrewd.

No matter the amount, we all have a relationship with money and possessions. Having a right relationship is important. What's hard is viewing money appropriately, handling possessions with care, and putting them to use wisely. These are topics Jesus covers in the gospel. There you'll find you can be...

Praised for being shrewd
Learn to be wise with resources
Learn to be faithful with resources

Maybe the manager was being fired because of ignorance, choosing bad investments. Maybe it was intentional; he really was stealing from his master. Either way **"There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions."** With no marketable skills and pride that kept him from begging, this manager had only moments to think of what to do. **"I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses. So he called in each one of his master's debtors."** This quick thinking manager made the people who owed his master owe him.

So genius even the master who suffered the loss was impressed. **"The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light."** The manager was praised for being shrewd. Every available resource was put to use for his advantage. There's a lesson for us to be learned in that.

Think fast about the resources God has given you. Financial skills, character traits, opportunities for growth. Wisdom, influence, authority, and attitude. The list could go on. But are you using them wisely or wasting them? If you're a strong influential personality but aren't putting it to use you're wasting that resource. If you have a position of authority but aren't using it to get things done, you're wasting that resource. Ask yourself: do I look for opportunities to pray for others and their needs? In my personal budget which receives more, offerings to church or entertainment? Am I doing everything I can to spread the gospel?

Of course thinking we'll use our resources wisely is foolish. It takes more than just street smarts or book learning. It takes God. Jesus makes you a man or woman of God. He's the King of kings and Lord of lords. He's praised for what he has done. Jesus while walking this earth had resources at his disposal. Legions of angels, fire from heaven, bolts of lightning. But he chose not to use this power. The power he used was far greater, the power of his grace. Grace he put to use for one thing, to save you from your sins.

God changes us by grace. Now changed, we are praised for being shrewd. God gave resources and God wants us to put all of them to work wisely for him. **"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."** Do you speak another language? Maybe there's someone you know who would be better served by the gospel in their own language. Take part in the Walking Together special offering today. It's an opportunity to be part of something bigger than we'll ever be alone. We band together with congregations around the country to help support mission work. We're going to other countries and places like New York City with the gospel because people shrewdly use their resources wisely. Will we be praised for being shrewd?

When I took my first job as a cook I wasn't ready for the responsibility of opening the restaurant by myself right away. But they did put me in charge of toast. After I mastered that I got potatoes and pancakes. From there I moved up to eggs and meat. Only then did I open by myself. It started with being in charge of a little. Once I showed I could faithfully handle that I got more responsibility.

This particular manager had a lot to manage. His master was wealthy so he probably had many animals and servants. But whether he had a lot or a little didn't matter. The master was looking for faithfulness. **"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much."** Even though the manager was only looking after possessions which would in time disappear, they told a lot about more important things. Those that can manage worldly wealth faithfully will be given heavenly wealth.

Do you have a large bank account or small? Are you caring for four kids or just one? Are you home all day with a lot of time and little responsibilities or is your schedule filled to capacity? It doesn't matter, God demands faithfulness. He's not expecting you to put your trust in money, just faithfully use it. He's not expecting your kids to be your life, but rather gifts that you care for faithfully. He's not expecting time to be spent on everything except him, rather balance it all. And where we fail we sin.

This money, these possessions aren't ours. Salvation isn't ours either. We didn't win it, earn it, or even prove faithful in using it. Another gave it to us. The one who was perfectly faithful in keeping God's commands; perfectly faithful in giving his life for all. He was perfectly faithful even to the point of dying on the cross for you and me. Every promise God made to you and me was fulfilled faithfully in Christ Jesus.

Because it's not ours money and possessions are a means to an end. Use them faithfully and reap the rewards. Give to natural disaster victims. But find ways to interact with them so you can share spiritual comfort as well as physical. Support the ministry of this congregation faithfully. Give to special offerings over and above your regular offering. Evaluate your faithfulness in light of God's mercy and forgiveness. Don't make your thanks requirements to get into heaven. Rather let them be joyful responses of someone already going to heaven.

It seems the business world is an 'anything goes' playground for those with influence and power. They'll do whatever it takes to succeed and often they do. Right or wrong, ethical or not, these people get things done. They're shrewd. The manager was going down, but he used his position and authority shrewdly and saved himself. He saw his environment and responded. Your sin drags you down but the gospel changes you. You have your position, authority, and money. Learn to use it wisely because it was given to you to use. Learn to use money and possessions faithfully. Put them to use in this world so they'll benefit you in the world to come. Then you too can be praised for being shrewd.