

September 22, 2013  
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

*Pentecost season file*  
(Series C)

St. Luke 16:8 (from the Gospel)

*(Jesus said:) "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.."*

## GOOD BAD GUY

This is a strange text. How can a bad man be a good example? What exactly is Jesus trying to teach? On the surface, this doesn't make much sense. There is no reason for the rich landowner (v. 1) to praise his manager for clever mismanagement. He cheated to secure himself a future. He played both ends against the middle to save himself. To the sharecroppers (v. 5) who were given huge discounts on their indebtedness, it looked like they were the beneficiaries of the rich man's generosity. Since their accounts were adjusted *quickly* (v. 6), there was no reason to suspect foul play. So when the rich man saw the result, what could he do? If he reversed the scheme, that would only make him look bad in the eyes of his renters and the surrounding community. It was much better to go along with the scheme and commend the *shrewdness* of the --

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Still scratching your head on this story?

Me, too; which is why I spent considerable time not only studying this parable, but searching for a current event comparable to the situation created by Jesus in this text. Now, before I reveal the results of my search, I want you to understand that there are a few differences that could be misleading, but far more similarities to make this message even more compelling. For one thing, I have no intention of triggering a debate, political or otherwise, with this introduction. My purpose for comparing the shady, somewhat obscure Biblical character described by Jesus in this text to someone from our world just as shrewd, is to isolate the main point missed again and again by people convinced they have nothing in common with the --

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The Pharisees were eaves-dropping. Jesus was talking to his disciples (v. 1), but somehow by the end of the story, we see that his enemies heard every word of it (v. 14). It is true – good news travels fast, but bad news gets there first.

On Sunday, June 9 the breaking story was a modern version of this parable. There was an interview by a reputable news team with an obscure, seemingly harmless computer geek, a systems analyst employed by the NSA (*National Security Agency*). He lived a comfortable, privileged life in Hawaii with an annual salary of \$200,000. He was a 29 year-old nobody knew or cared about until his boss – the federal government of the United States – vilified him for apparently leaking classified information about our nation's surveillance programs abroad and at home. Maybe you can still remember his name, even though this story is now four months old. He is *Edward Snowden*, hailed by his supporters as a hero and hunted by his enemies as a traitor. His disclosures have already changed our way of life, making him the leading candidate for our next --

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What did he do? Understand that nobody knows for sure, but what has most people upset is what they hope he didn't do. One thing is for sure. Whether we think of him positively or negatively, like the dishonest manager fired by the rich man in our text, *Edward Snowden* is one shrewd dude. When this story broke, I started to wonder about what I always thought to be true about my Savior, my church, my career, my country, and my computer. Was somebody listening to my cell phone calls? Was a stranger using my *Facebook* page to track me? Was my freedom of speech as a called and ordained servant of the Word under surveillance? Check this out. Listen to the way we talk.

- We hate sin, but we love the sinner.  
Christians talk this way.
- We hate the source, but love the story.  
Reporters talk this way.
- We hate the traitor, but love the truth.  
Americans talk this way.

Listen to the way Jesus talked. The Greek he spoke is very helpful. There is nothing in this controversial parable to suggest that the manager was innocent of the charges brought against him. We may think an independent audit will clear him, but the present participle used in verse two (Gk: *diaskorpizon*) the *one who is wasting* what belongs to his employer ... is definitely him! Upon his arrest when he is ordered by his master to (Gk: *apodos*) *turn in* the books, the imperative leaves no wiggle room for renegotiation. As an aorist imperative, the Greek word means judgment is final with lasting consequences. Many have interpreted this as a connection to the end of time. His goose is definitely cooked! It is game over for the --  
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He starts scratching his head. There must be some way out. Like most whistle blowers in our world, he exposes the system to tell his side of the story. The Greek word used to describe his clever scheme is (Gk: *phronimos*), worldly *sensible*, *prudent*, and of course, *shrewd* through and through. Jesus compares his savvy solution in an apparent no-win situation to the spiritual sensibility needed by his disciples, if they are to faithful in proclaiming the kingdom. Now, this is where most of us bail. Did our Lord really intend for us to learn an important lesson from the --  
GOOD BAD GUY (?)

The *dishonest manager* fired for wasting money?  
*Edward Snowden* finding political asylum in Moscow?

What about the eaves-droppers, those self-righteous Pharisees? Greed was their creed. When they heard this parable they had to be rooting for the shrewd dude, but not when confronted by the truth. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said no one entered the kingdom of God unless their righteousness exceeded that of the Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). So does that make them the good guys? According to the Law they missed the mark of their own standard. That would make them the *bad* good guys in the religious community, which sounds a bit confusing. So, let's be clear about this --  
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There are good things to learn from bad examples. Nothing happens that doesn't matter, especially when living by grace through faith on account of Christ. He didn't die and rise from the dead for us to miss the point. He wants us to use everything in the vast treasury of God's kingdom to proclaim what he has done to save us. Sunday school, Bible study, preaching, teaching, counseling, calling on the sick, the shut-ins, the dying, witnessing to the inactive, delinquents, even those loud, obnoxious neighbors next door, and don't forget those nice church people sitting in the pews every Sunday; Jesus wants to commend us all to talk the walk of faith before *time is up* like it was for the --

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What we can learn from (v. 8), may be summarized in three points:

- ▶ Don't waste God's investment in you; spend what he has given to you through the life, death, and resurrection of his only Son for the profit of the kingdom.
- ▶ Be sensible, prudent, and shrewd with the treasures entrusted to you through the proclamation of the Holy Gospel; get the message out before its time to close the books.
- ▶ And by all means at your disposal as a good steward of God's grace, be just as eager and creative in winning souls for Christ as this world is in making friends for material gain.

There is a legend which tells that when Jesus ascended into heaven following his great work of redemption, he was asked by an angel, "How do you propose to make known to the world the fact that you have died for the sins of all?" In reply, the Savior said, "I have my followers on earth, and I have commanded them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to men everywhere." But the angel said, "What if they should fail?" "If they fail," said Jesus, "I have no other plan."

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May God empower us all to do it and be sensible about it like the --  
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In Jesus' Name,  
A M E N

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