

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *He Said What? The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, these sermon outlines will use the same Scripture passages as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

The Point: Be wise with resources and opportunities.

Introduction: When I was in college in the late eighties, ABC aired a highly-publicized special about the famous mobster, Al Capone. It seemed the hotel where he had lived in Chicago was being demolished, and they had found some secret vaults underneath the hotel. The program was broadcast live, and it was hosted by Geraldo Rivera. Everyone seemed to have a theory about what they would find in the vaults. Some suspected they would find all kinds of hidden treasures. Others thought they might find the bones of some of Al Capone's victims. Unfortunately, it didn't turn out that way. They blasted away one wall, cleared away a mountain of debris, and then they found another wall behind. They blasted through that wall and found more debris, and then another wall. On and on it went for the entire evening.

While the program didn't turn out like people expected, it was still educational. For instance, they showed all the various tunnels and secret passages in the hotel. This was so Capone could make a quick getaway if the feds came looking for him. It also enabled him to hide evidence quickly. As my friends and I watched the program, one of my friends commented that Al Capone was a smart man. I had to agree. If you think about it, most successful criminals are quite clever. If they weren't, they would get caught in a second.

Jesus told a story about a smart crook. Was Jesus actually condoning the man's actions? No, He only commended his shrewdness. The lesson in this story is really a very simple one: even crooks have enough sense to prepare for the future.

- I. A desperate dilemma.
 - A. Jesus told a parable about a steward.
 1. This steward had charge of his master's money.
 - a. He had "wasted" his master's money. He had not necessarily stolen the money, but he had spent it foolishly.
 - b. The master not only terminated his employment, but he also demanded an accounting from the steward.
 2. This put the steward in a terrible quandary.
 - a. He would not only lose his job, but when word spread about what happened, no one else would hire him as a steward.
 - b. He was not strong enough to do manual labor, and he was too proud to go on the streets and beg for money.
 - B. Are you ready for your "day of reckoning"?

1. We know the day of judgment is coming.
 - a. Those who have rejected Christ will answer for their sins.
 - b. If you have trusted in Christ, your eternal destiny is settled, but you will still have to give an account to God for how you've spent your time here on earth (2 Corinthians 5:10).
2. We do not know when it will happen.
 - a. Death can happen to anyone, and at any moment.
 - b. The steward had sense enough to prepare for his day of judgment. Do you have sense enough to prepare for yours?

II. A shady solution.

- A. The steward came up with a clever idea.
 1. He called in each of his master's debtors.
 - a. Most likely they were husbandmen, which means they worked the master's land and paid him with a portion of the crops.
 - b. "An hundred measures of oil" – He probably grew olives, and paid the landowner in olive oil.
 2. How was the steward able to reduce their debts?
 - a. Some say he deducted the interest that was owed, or he waived his own commission.
 - b. Since Jesus said he was "unjust", he likely did something illegal.
- B. Surprisingly, his master praised what he had done.
 1. He did not approve of what the steward had done, but he had to admit his actions were clever.
 - a. The debtors would remember his kindness to them, and they would give him food and shelter when he was unemployed.
 - b. If he wore out his welcome with one debtor, he had many more who owed him favors.
 2. Jesus did not commend the steward's ethics (which were lacking), but He did commend his foresight.
 - a. Even the unbelieving people of this world have enough good sense to prepare for the future.
 - b. We know our judgment day awaits, so should we not make ready?

III. Some timeless truths.

- A. "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" – Other translations say, "Make friends by means of unrighteous wealth".
 1. Jesus meant you should use your money for things that matter.
 - a. "When ye fail" – A better translation is, "When it fails." In other words, someday your money will fade away.
 - b. If you've invested your money in nothing but earthly possessions, you will have nothing to show when you stand before God.
 2. You may not have much, but you should use what you have.
 - a. God knows what resources He has entrusted to you, and He expects you to use them for His glory.
 - b. If you are not wise with the little you have, why should He entrust more resource to you?
- B. How are you investing what God has entrusted to you?
 1. Your money belongs to Him, and you are simply a steward.
 - a. If you have not been faithful with earthly resources, why would God give you a reward in heaven?
 - b. If you've been unfaithful with God's resources, which do not even belong to you, why should He give you rewards of your own?
 2. What are some ways to invest God's resources?

- a. Give to worthy charities.
- b. Help individuals in need.
- c. Support world missions.

Conclusion: When I was about five or six years old, my Dad and brother and I went fishing at my great uncle's farm. My Mom's uncle had a farm outside Corinth, Mississippi, and he had a nice-sized lake on it. We were out in the boat fishing, and late that afternoon we saw Uncle Bynum's mule coming to the lake. Uncle Bynum had a little garden, and he used the mule for plowing it. The mule came on down to the lake, and he waded out into the water, some distance from the bank. A short time later, Uncle Bynum came down to the lake, and he wasn't happy. The mule had seen him get the plow and harness out of the barn, and he knew what was getting ready to happen. He waded out in the lake so Uncle Bynum couldn't get to him! Uncle Bynum tried everything to get that mule out of the lake. He yelled at him and threw sticks at him. That mule didn't budge.

I told that story some time ago and a lady said, "That was a smart mule!" Indeed, he was. He knew Uncle Bynum was about to put him to work, so he took precautions to prevent it from happening. If a mule can plan ahead, shouldn't we do the same? We know a day of judgment is coming. Someday all of us will stand before God and answer for what we've done in this life. God has warned us about it in advance. Are you using your time and resources wisely – in a way that brings glory to God? Even though you're one of His children, He'll still demand an accounting from you. Remember this parable of Jesus. Learn your lesson from this clever crook and get ready for the day of reckoning.

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