

Luke 16:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

Analysis

Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. The steward's internal deliberation reveals his desperate situation. The phrase "within himself" (ἐν ἑαυτῷ, en heautō) indicates this is private calculation, not conversation—he's weighing options without counsel. His question "What shall I do?" (τί ποιήσω, ti poiēsō) expresses urgency; he must act immediately while he still has authority. The aorist participle "taketh away" (ἀφαιρεῖται, aphaireitai) confirms the decision is final—there's no appealing or reversing the termination.

His self-assessment—"I cannot dig" (σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω, skaptein ouk ischyō, "I lack strength to dig") and "to beg I am ashamed" (ἐπατεῖν αἰσχύνομαι, epaitain aischynomai)—reveals both physical limitation and social pride. Manual labor is beyond his capacity (perhaps due to age, soft living, or lack of training), and begging would destroy his social status. This crisis forces creativity: if he cannot work with his hands or depend on charity, he must use his wits. **His predicament illustrates the human condition: we face certain judgment, lack resources to save ourselves, and must urgently use whatever means God has given to secure our eternal future.** The steward's shrewdness lies in recognizing his crisis and acting decisively—a pattern Jesus commends for believers facing eschatological urgency.

Historical Context

In first-century Palestinian society, estate managers occupied a middle social position—above manual laborers but dependent on their employer's favor. Losing such a position meant social descent into manual labor (shameful for educated managers) or begging (utterly degrading). The steward's predicament reflects ancient economic vulnerability—no unemployment benefits, retirement plans, or social services. His reference to digging (σκάπτειν, hard agricultural labor) and begging (ἐπαίτεῖν, dependence on charity) represents the binary of desperate options. His scheme to secure future hospitality by reducing debtors' obligations exploits his final moments of authority.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the steward's urgent calculation in the face of certain judgment mirror the urgency believers should feel about eternal realities?
2. What 'resources' has God entrusted to you that could be strategically invested for eternal rather than temporal outcomes?
3. How does pride (the steward's shame at begging) sometimes prevent people from seeking help or acknowledging their true spiritual condition?

Interlinear Text

εἶπεν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὁ οἰκονόμος Τί ποιήσω ὅτι
said **Then** **within** **himself** ^{G3588} **the steward** **What** **shall I do** **for**
G2036 G1161 G1722 G1438 G3623 G5101 G4160 G3754

ὁ κύριός μου ἀφαιρεῖται τὴν οἰκονομίαν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ
^{G3588} **lord** **my** **taketh away** ^{G3588} **the stewardship** **from** **me**
G2962 G3450 G851 G3622 G575 G1700

σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω ἐπαιτεῖν αἰσχύνομαι
dig **I cannot** ^{G2480} **to beg** **I am ashamed**
G4626 G3756 G1871 G153

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