

THE UNJUST STEWARD (LUKE 16:1-13)

VOCAB WORDS:

1. **Steward:** a servant of a master that manages portions of the master's estate. The steward in this parable manages the master's money.
2. **Mammon:** this is the Aramaic word for wealth. It can (in this case) be justly translated as money.

THE CONTEXT:

Who is Jesus teaching? (Lk 16:1)

Jesus is teaching His disciples. This parable comes immediately after the three-fold parable in Luke 15. Luke 15:1-2 tells us that Jesus was speaking to sinners and Pharisees. After teaching three parables about repentance to those groups, He then turns to His disciples in Luke 16 to teach them as well. There is no indication that the audience around Jesus changed. Luke 16:14 let's us know that the Pharisees are still around. Jesus will now teach a lesson for His disciples indirectly giving an important message to the Pharisees as well. This parable will be advice for his disciples and criticism for the Pharisees.

THE PARABLE: LK 16:1-8

Who is the main character in this parable? Is he a good worker? What does the master decide to do?

The main character is a steward that manages his master's money. The master gets a report that the steward is foolishly wasting the master's money. The master decides to fire his steward.

How does the steward respond?

When the steward hears that he is being fired, he becomes stressed. He considers himself too weak to dig and too proud to beg. The steward will have no means of income after he is fired. His future is looking bleak. With the end near, he has to think quickly to save himself.

What unjust clever deed does he do to save himself?

Since he will have no way to support himself after being fired, he needs to ensure that others will care for him. Verse four tells us that he thinks of a way to guarantee that people will receive him in their homes. He summons those who owe his master money, and greatly decreases the size of their bill. One debtor owes 100 measures of oil. The steward tells him to only pay half. Another debtor owes 100 measures of wheat. The steward tells him to only pay 80%. The debtors will be very grateful for the generous discounts. When the steward is out of work, they will feel compelled to be merciful to him as he was to them. Since the steward knew that he was inevitably being fired, he thought it prudent to continue defrauding his master to quickly make friends in the outside world. This was sneaky but effective.

How does the master respond?

When the master heard of what the unjust steward had done, he was impressed by his cleverness. What an interesting bunch of characters. First, there is the wasteful steward that steals from his master to make alliances with others, and second is the rich master who admires this crafty steward's deceit. Sometimes Jesus uses evil characters to make a good point. Just because the characters are wicked does not mean God condones their wickedness. This will be seen with a closer look at the moral and interpretation.

THE MORAL: LK 16:9 "MAKE FRIENDS BY MEANS OF MAMMON"

This is certainly a strange parable, and at first glance, the moral doesn't clarify it any. A closer look will make it a little clearer. First, look back to verse 8. Jesus says, "the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to each other than the sons of light."

- **Sons of this age:** Jesus refers to the sons of this age in contrast to the sons of light. Sons of this age worry about the present, about physical things. Does the steward sound like a "son of this age"? Yes he does. He was very concerned about the present. It led him to act shrewdly in relation to his master. Shrewd means, "showing sharp powers of judgment" or "astute". Even though his deeds were sinful, Jesus is making a point that he was able to effectively make relationships with his shrewd behavior.
- **Sons of light:** this term stands in contrast with "sons of this age". Sons of light aren't concerned about the present. They are concerned about heavenly things. Being sons of light, they walk in the light, and put their minds on heavenly things. Jesus is making the point that they are lacking some of the shrewd behavior that sons of this age possess. Even though the steward, being a son of this age, is acting sinfully, there are still some things that the sons of light can learn from his behavior. The moral will help explain what.

In verse 9, Jesus is telling His disciples to "make friends by means of mammon of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into eternal dwellings". The moral is that the disciples need to use their money to make friends. When the money fails, they will still have eternal dwellings in their friendships. This is an encouragement for His disciples to use earthly physical things for heavenly purposes.

- **Mammon of unrighteousness:** as said before, mammon simply refers to money or wealth. Jesus tells them to make friends with their money. Mammon of unrighteousness sounds bad, but it isn't. Jesus is making the point that money lacks righteousness. Mammon is a physical earthly thing. Jesus refers to money as "mammon of righteousness" to stress its physical nature. Jesus goes onto say that it will fail. When this life is over, our money has no value or purpose.

Again, this moral is encouraging the disciples to find the spiritual purpose in even the most physical things. The application of this moral will tell us how to do so.

THE APPLICATION (LK 16:9-13)

Jesus stresses that if we are faithful in little, we will be faithful in much. If we look at the little things of this earth, like money, and use them faithfully, we will be faithful in greater heavenly things as well. If we use money unfaithfully, then we won't be able to be faithful with more heavenly things. Our life is full of insignificant things. We go to work, we go to school, we go to the post office, etc... These things may seem insignificant, but they make up a big picture. If, on the way to the post office, I curse the old lady who drives too slowly, I am being unfaithful in the little things. If I am unfaithful in these "seemingly" little things, God will not entrust heavenly riches to me. We need to be critical of how we use everything in our life to see if we are using it for God.

- Jesus encouraged the disciples to use their money to make friends. This is seen in Acts 2 when the young church was sharing all that they had with each other. They were effectively using their physical money in spiritual ways. This will guarantee that God will give them heavenly riches.
- The Pharisees were lovers of money. They didn't like this message (Lk 16:14). They didn't see the value of this message. If we look at Mark 7:9-13, the Pharisees weren't using their money for spiritual purposes. They would deny someone the money needed to care for their parents so they could put it in the treasury. The Pharisees were keeping the money to themselves.

If this shrewd evil steward has enough sense to use his money for physical alliances, the sons of light should be keen enough to use physical things for spiritual purposes. Let us not diminish the spiritual value of anything. Even money in all its potential evil has its place in the kingdom of heaven. Let's act shrewdly to make the most spiritual benefit of all the God has given us.