

The Parable of the Unjust Steward-Explained!

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This is one of the most perplexing parables Jesus ever taught. Why did Jesus say we must make friends with the “mammon of unrighteousness”?

Jesus taught in parables to convey a message-a teaching for *his* disciples. The disciples asked Jesus, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” (Matthew 13:10). Jesus answered, “...Because it is given unto *you* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is *not* given.” (v.11). These teachings were for God’s people to understand. The general audience *rejected Jesus’ teachings* so the meaning was *deliberately* clouded because their, “...heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes ***they have closed***; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” (v.15). Spiritual blockage to their heart (mind) prevented the word of God to penetrate and receive the pure flow of the word of God to heal them and make them happy-this is something *they* have chosen-Psalmist says, “Their heart is as *fat as grease*;” (119:70). However, “Truly God *is* good to Israel, *even* to such as are of a *clean* heart.” (Psalm 73:1). The disciples’ hearts were open and so they received the true meaning of the teachings of Christ.

Spiritual *fat* (the commandments and traditions of men) that *people choose* over the word of God prevents the word from penetrating and healing people spiritually and physically because *they choose it* to be so! Let us as God’s people put aside our preconceived ideas and traditions and let the pure word of God flow through our hearts so we can understand the teachings of Christ.

The “Unjust” Steward

In Luke the 16th chapter it says, “And he [Jesus] said *also* unto his *disciples*...” (v.1). In Luke 15 he “he spake this parable unto *them*” (v.3), meaning the publicans, sinners and the Pharisees (vv.1-2). Now he directs this parable to his

disciples and says, “There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.” (16:1).

Who is the “Rich man?” Many believe that this represents God-but it does *not*! The context is “mammon of unrighteousness;” (v.9). The word “mammon” “is a Chaldee word, meaning *riches*.” (Vincent Word Studies, emphasis his). The riches “of unrighteousness” is *worldly* riches-for the *focus* of the story is the “children of this world.” (v.8) So the “rich man” is just an ordinary *worldly unconverted* business man. “In this parable the characters are *all wicked*—the steward and the man whose possessions he manages are both unsavory characters. This should alert us to the fact that Jesus is *not* exhorting us to emulate the behavior of the characters *but is trying to expound on a larger principle*.” (Article; What is the meaning of the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13)? Emphasis added).

One must remember that the *focus* of the Gospel of Luke is a gospel to *rich* people. His Gospel was a message *for* the Rich. Luke was Rich and wanted to share the Gospel *with* the rich. We make a profound *mistake* to see Luke as an evangelist *against* the rich. He is, more accurately, an evangelist *to* the rich. Jesus himself was rich and Luke is showing in his Gospel that Jesus was *not* against the rich, but teaching the rich *how* to use, and put into proper *perspective* their riches. (For more details read our article, “Was Luke the Evangelist Rich?”).

This rich man had a “steward.” “A steward was a manager, especially a manager of money or property.” (David Guzik Enduring Word Commentary). In a modern perspective this steward would be like a *fund manager* handling a person’s wealth.

This rich man, “accused unto him [the steward] that he had wasted his goods.” (v.1). The steward had authority over the master’s resources and could transact business in his name. This requires the utmost level of trust in the steward. The steward is being released for “wasted his goods” meaning he “had squandered upon himself.” (Cambridge Bible). This is why he had to “give an account of thy stewardship” (v.2). He wanted to know where his money went. Like today, even though most fund managers are honest people there have been plenty of cases of unscrupulous advisors milking their clients and funneling the money into their pockets.

So before the steward was fired he conducted a few more business deals to save himself, “I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.” (v.4). He was determine to show his Lord’s

clients what a *skillful* and merciful business man he was so they would receive him and continue to do business with him even after he was fired.

Afterward his business dealings (see vv.5-7), "...the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done *wisely*:" (v.8). The rich man "commended" the steward *and so did* Jesus of his wise business deals-*not* his defrauding of the rich man.

Notice, the word "wisely" in this passage is "phronimōs" (Strong's #5429-30). This means, "*shrewdly*" "...in the modern sense of *sagaciously*...In Matt 7:24-26, it is applied to the sagacious man who built his house on the rock, opposed to the *foolish* (μωρός) man who built on the sand...It is a middle term, *not* bringing out prominently the moral characteristics, *either good or evil*, of the action to which it is applied, but recognizing in it a skillful adaptation of the *means to the end*" (Vincent Word Studies, emphasis his and mine). A sagacious person is one who is, "quick and wise in understanding and judgment" (Merriam Webster's Dictionary). Jesus used this word for the "wise" person who built his house on a "rock" in Matthew 7:24. The steward did nothing evil-but that he was *wise in his dealings* with his master's merchandise-this is what Jesus liked!

Jesus says in the latter end of that same verse, "for the children of this world are in their generation *wiser* [phronimōs] than the children of light." Now the feel of this verse is, "There is underlying the Lord's *deep* and *sorrowful* reflection here..." (Pulpit Commentary). You can put the word "Unfortunately" at the beginning of this sentence reading, "[Unfortunately]...the children of this world are in their generation *wiser* than the children of light." It is *unfortunate* that the people of God aren't "wise" when it comes to business and finance like the people of the world. Jesus wants his people to be so as he says, "be ye therefore *wise* [phronimōs] as serpents," (Matthew 10:16). However God's people chose *not* to be "wise" in business and commerce, and they should be because *these skills will be needed in the kingdom of God!* (Read The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30).

Today Christians believe the lie that wealth is *evil* and poverty is *good* and pious and nothing could be further from the truth. Wealth is spiritual! God says "gold" is "good" (Gen 2:12). He says that "Gold" and "silver" which was the medium of exchange in ancient times *is his* (Haggai 2:8). Solomon says people with wisdom will have riches and honor and glory (Proverbs 8:18-21) yet Christians today believe the opposite and think wealth is carnal and poverty is spiritual. Job was a very *spiritual man* and was very rich as was Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus here is lamenting about his people in the verse above. The *world* follows God's wealth

Principles whether *they know it or not* (Matthew 5:45)-and believers in Christ do *not!* *Christians need to begin to follow the wealth principles of the Bible to demonstrate just how spiritual they really are!*

Notice in the Old Testament there are two sets of people in the world right from the beginning. The carnal people of Cain were building cities and setting up economies with cattle and instruments and metal (Gen 4:16-23); and where did they get this information of kingdom building from? Kingdom building and wealth principles only come from one place-God! (see Deut 8:18).

Notice the second set of people-God's people. *Instead* of building Kingdoms, they are building altars. They are setting up places of worship which *is* good, but are *not* building kingdoms-this is what God wants. God used Moses to organize and establish the *kingdom* of Israel. He called David and Solomon to rule and expand the *kingdom* of Israel. Jesus said to, "...seek ye *first* the *kingdom of God*, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:19). Jesus is coming again to establish the *Kingdom* of God on this earth (Isaiah 9:6-7). God's people ought to be *kingdom builders*-spreading Kingdom culture around the world and serving people. The Devil does *not* want this to occur so he created the lie of wealth being wicked and poverty is spiritual to prevent God's people from building kingdom culture on this earth and having dominion.

So let us, as God's people, be "wise" in business *in* this world even as some were in the church "But whoso hath this world's good[s]" (1 John 3:17); and grow the kingdom and spread God's culture on this earth and serve people, "and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17). Does the "love of God" dwell in you? If it does, then let's be wise, let's be rich and serve the people of this world!

"Friends of the mammon of unrighteousness"

What did Jesus mean by, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;" (Luke 16:9). This is a *direct command* from Christ as the beginning of the verse states, "And I say unto you..."

As noted above "mammon" means riches-more specifically money, "This word 'mammon' does *not* denote, as some have supposed, the name of a deity, the god of wealth or money, but it signifies '*money*' itself. It is a Syriac or Aramaic term." (Pulpit Commentary, emphasis added).

The NET (New English Translation) of the Bible translates “mammon of unrighteousness” as “worldly wealth.” “In referring to ‘worldly wealth’...Worldly here means *‘having to do with life on earth.’* In your earthly life, ‘make friends;’ that is, *bless others.*” (Article: What did Jesus mean when He spoke of making friends by worldly wealth (Luke 16:9)? Emphasis added).

Jesus says to “Make to yourselves friends” with “world wealth.” Here Jesus is showing why people struggle today when it comes to money. This is a huge “money block.” Money blocks are real and if a person has an attitude that money is the root of all evil, money is bad etc....will they ever obtain riches? Absolutely Not! We must have a friendly attitude towards money; again it is all in the mind-money is spiritual! (Get our booklet Money Blocks-The Christian Mind Set, for more information).

Then Jesus says, “that, when ye fail” Now “...all the best texts read ἐκλίπη, ‘when it (the *mammon*) fails.’” (Vincent Word Studies, emphasis added). The “world wealth” fails for the *people of the world* because do *not* have Godly wisdom; Human nature will always set in, greed lust etc.... and the end result is always bankruptcy. Abundance and wealth will *always* be on the earth, God *created* it in this way-the problem is man’s nature that always brings it to ruin-it is always mismanaged like what the unjust steward did with his lord’s goods. Solomon rightly says, “The poor might have good land that produces plenty of food, but *bad decisions can take it away.*” (Prov 13:23 ERV). There is *never* lack in this world-just bad judgment and decisions that causes it.

Those however who have *Godly wisdom* when it comes to riches the bible says, “Riches and honour *are* with me; yea, *durable riches* and righteousness.” (Prov 8:18). Their riches last because they apply the ways of God when it comes to the riches of this world.

Now when the worldly wealth fails *for the people of the world*, Jesus says, “they may *receive you* into everlasting habitations.” Like the unjust steward who said before he dealt with the debtors, “I am resolved what to do, that, when I am *put out* of the stewardship, *they may receive me into their houses*” (v.4). Before the steward got fired, because he did “wisely” with his business dealings, the rich man’s *clients* would take him in because *they know he was a skilled business man.* Remember, the unjust steward was getting fired *not* because he wasn’t a good business man, but rather he “wasted his goods.” (v.1).

So what is Christ saying here? *As* the unjust steward was wise in his dealings so should Christians be, so “they [the people of the world] may receive *you*” As they received the steward with kindness because of how they were *blessed* by his *skilled financial plan*. Jesus is telling his disciples to be wise in the business of this world so you can save people when it all fails-not just physical salvation but “into *everlasting* habitations” *spiritual* salvation as well. By putting your faith in action, “Let your light so shine before men, *that they may see your good works*, and *glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16) you are glorifying God showing people the right way to live and conduct business, and people will convert and believe the Gospel. What you do, and your success *in this life* matters, and it *translates* to the kingdom of God! (see below)

Christ concludes, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

“If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*?

“And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own? (Luke 16:10-12).

In verse 10, Jesus is saying that if a person has been *faithful* in his/her administration of the *temporary* goods of earth, it is clear that he/she can be entrusted with the *eternal* things which belong to the kingdom of God. God has given his people an assignment which *we must carried out* and be “faithful” right to the end, “and they that are with him *are* called, and chosen, and *faithful*.” (Rev 17:14).

Then in verse 11, “This is the application...*seems to be directed to the disciples of Christ*” (Gill’s Commentary) that, If you are not faithful in *the temporary matters pertaining to this world*, the “unrighteous mammon” meaning “worldly riches” and you do *not* apply the skills and wisdom of the bible towards your property, business and influence, you *cannot* expect God will commit to *you the true riches of the Kingdom of God*. It matters what you do in this life because we are developing Godly character-it must be developed because again it translates to the kingdom of God. The Parable of the Talents contains the same lesson.

Then verse 12 Jesus says, “And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s” “The word ‘man’s’ is *not* in the original. It is, ‘If ye have been unfaithful managers for another.’” (Barnes Notes, emphasis added). “It refers, doubtless, to ‘God.’ The wealth of the world is ‘his.’ [see Psalm 24:1; 1 Cor 10:26, 28] *It is committed to us as his stewards*.” (ibid, emphasis added). If we are not faithful in

the business of this world-the riches God has given to his people, of managing and working the riches for his glory and serving people, then, “who shall give you that which is your own?”-Jesus says! If we do business in this life truly and honestly as Christians, ***then the true and eternal riches will be given to the Christian in the Kingdom of God***-of being ruler of over cities, countries, judging angels etc.... “On that day, declares the LORD of Hosts, you will each invite your neighbor to sit under *your own* vine and fig tree.” (Zech 3:10 BSB). Responsibility matters in this life-if we are responsible with the things God has given us-he will give more in the Kingdom of God, “For unto every one that hath shall be *given*, and he shall have *abundance*: but from him that hath *not* shall be *taken away even that which he hath*.” (Matthew 25:29). God wants “profitable” servants. We must develop those skills for the kingdom of God-now is the time to develop them!

This belief that Christians should just “get by” or “renounce all worldly goods” is not the responsible Godly thing to do. God says to be fruitful and multiply, not bury what we have in the sand and sit on it. God wants producers in the Kingdom of God.

“The meaning of the whole parable is, therefore, thus expressed: *If we do not use the things of this world as we ought* - with honesty, truth, wisdom, and integrity... If we are true to that which is least [temporary things], *it is an evidence that we are the children of God*, and he will commit to our trust that which is of *infinite importance, even the eternal riches and glory*...” (Barnes Notes, emphasis added).