

The Parables of Jesus

- The Unjust Steward

(Luke 16:1-8)

This parable is found only in the Gospel of Luke. It immediately follows the parables of the "Lost Sheep," the "Lost Piece of Silver" and the "Lost (Prodigal) Son." Jesus was leaving Capernaum on the way to Jerusalem where He would be crucified. In Luke 16:1, we see that Jesus addresses this parable to His disciples.

However, in Luke 16:14, we see that the Pharisees and scribes were right there as well and they would hear everything that Jesus was saying. Jesus did not necessarily speak directly to the Pharisees and scribes, but we can be assured that He knew they were right there listening and that they would "overhear" what He was saying and get the point of this parable just as much as His disciples would.

The Parable of the "The Unjust Steward" - Luke 16:1-8 - *"...There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. 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. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."*

As we prepare to discuss this parable, let us first review the "characters" in the parable.

- The "rich man" - this was the owner of a business or estate and the one who the "steward" would be working for.
- The "steward" - This was a person who would be entrusted by the owner to oversee and watch over his assets - whatever they may be. This "steward" was to be the "middle man" or mediator between the owner and the purchasers. He would conduct the "day to day" business for the owner of the business. We see that Jesus goes on to detail some very "unjust" business behavior by this steward.
- The "debtors" - These would be your basic purchasers of goods that bought goods from the owner, through the steward, basically on credit, knowing they would have to pay for what they bought. These "debtors" were just as dishonest and without scruples as the steward was.
- The "children of this world" - to be discussed later
- The "children of light" - To be discussed later

The first thing we need to address is what would seem to many of us as an "oddity" that Jesus would be commending someone's dishonesty, as well as their unfaithfulness to their employer or owner. This steward's character and behavior goes against everything that Jesus is and everything He was expressing to those following Him. Hey, this was exactly the kind of lifestyle, behavior and shady business practices that the publicans and sinners would be used to and most likely practiced.

If Jesus was commending the behavior of the steward in this parable then He would be commending the sinful and wicked behavior of everyone listening. There would be no need to change their lifestyle. Jesus, through this parable would be giving each of them a "loophole." That should be our first "red flag." Jesus would never exhort His followers to emulate the behavior of this unjust steward. We should be alert to the fact that, being that this would seem totally contradictory to Jesus and His teachings, that He was therefore expressing a greater principle that He was teaching to His disciples and the religious leaders who were nearby, listening. Therefore, we need to look at this parable more closely and with "ears to hear."

Let's take a brief synopsis of the parable. The parable begins with a "rich man" calling his steward before him to inform the steward that he was aware of what was going on and that the steward was being released for mismanaging his master's resources. Apparently, the "rich man" does not release him on the spot. The owner is being "gracious" to this steward, even though he misused his entrusted position. The owner gave this steward some time before fully releasing him. Possibly, the owner was hoping that this steward would turn from his "unjust ways" so he would be able to keep him on. Unfortunately, we see that "repenting" and turning from his unjust actions was the furthest thing from the steward's mind. He would use this extra time to conduct a few more "unscrupulous" transactions before he leaves the job.

The steward, realizing that he will soon be without a job, uses His position that he is still in to prepare for when he is finally released. He ponders on the fact that he may have to actually go out and really work for a living. He thinks up a scheme that he thinks would help him when he is finally terminated. He decides to become the "friend" of those that he has done business with on behalf of the owner of the business.

He makes some shrewd deals behind his master's back by reducing the debt owed by several of the master's debtors in exchange for possible "favors" which may include "room and board" when he is eventually terminated. In other words he was implying to the debtors, "I'll wash your back so don't forget me when I need my back washed."

When the master becomes aware of what the wicked servant had done, he commends him for his "shrewdness." Notice that the owner "commends" the "unjust steward" for his shrewdness and his consistency in his dishonesty. However, he **does not condone** the actions done. There is a big difference. Hey, if you are going to be dishonest, you may as well go all the way. However, that still doesn't make it right. The steward was truly unjust and dishonest. Unfortunately, he remained, true to who he was.

In the later part of verse 8, Jesus begins to give us a clue concerning what the ultimate principle was that He was trying to teach His disciples. Luke 16:8, "*... for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*" Who is Jesus referring to when He says, "...children of this world?"

These are those who, in their everyday activities, follow after, live by and work in the concepts and principles of what we have come to commonly refer to as worldly or carnal ways of life - living in and by the flesh. They live by the rules and concepts of "their generation" which is ruled and directed by the "god of this world" (2Corinthians 4:4) along with the forces of darkness.

These are people whose mindset and actions are such in that they think they need to do things the "worldly and carnal" way because it is the only way to succeed in this wicked and sinful world. These are those that have learned to do whatever it takes, even if it means being dishonest, to get what they need or want. It is the classic case of living in the "dog eat dog world," the "all about me mindset," the "what can I get out of it" and the "what's in it for me" mentality that has infiltrated and continually envelopes every aspect of this world. It is all about one's one selfish wants, needs and desires. These are those that have forgotten, or should we say, chose not to follow God's precepts and ways, but unfortunately, have chosen the path that the devil has deceived many into taking, thinking that it is the road that will lead to their happiness and success.

Next, let us look into who are those that Jesus is referring to when He says, "*...children of light?*" This phrase is an ancient but yet still used term by the Jewish people in referring to those who desire to live by the principles, precepts, ways and commandments of God in their everyday life. This terminology was used in much of the Essene writings that have been found along with the "Dead Sea Scrolls" at Qumram that date back to the time of Jesus. We see this term used by Jesus in John 12:36 and by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:8 and 1Thessalonians 5:5 in reference to the followers of Christ being the "children of the light."

Putting together what we discussed concerning the "children of this world" and the "children of the light," let us see what Jesus was saying and teaching to His disciples by the use of the phrase, "... *for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light?*" Very simply he is most likely, telling them something that they already knew.

Those who live in the ways of the world, the flesh, do seem to have the advantage "in their generation, or we can say, in the world. It would seem that you would need to be just like the world if you were going to succeed. Not just succeed but to survive. It would seem like the ways and precepts of God are only good to reflect on when we are in synagogue or for us "church." However, when we are out in the "real world" we need to fall in line with the world's economy of doing things and become just like the world to survive. Hmm...

Does that seem like something Jesus would teach and actually live out in His own life? Does this sound right to you? Unfortunately, many of Jesus' followers at that time and even today thought and think this way. That way of unscrupulousness may work in the world's economy but it does not make it right in the Kingdom's economy. To get the point of what Jesus was teaching we **must** continue reading. In other words we must take this parable within the context of the entire teaching found within this section of Luke. This is imperative to grasping what this parable is teaching.

Let's continue with Luke 16:9 - *"And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."* Jesus is continuing His thought from verse 8. He is saying that if that is the way you choose to live your life - by living and doing things by the world's sinful and wicked ways - than you better go all the way and do it with all you have. He was saying that, just as the "unjust" steward schemed to take care of himself, so should the "children of this world" do if they are going to live in that system. That person will succeed in that system (the world's way) and that system (the things of this world) will "take care of you."

However, a vital part of understanding what Jesus is teaching is found in His statement, *"they will receive you into everlasting habitations."* The question I would like to ask is this - Where will the "everlasting habitation" of the "children of the world" be? Where will the everlasting dwelling place for the **unjust** be? We know the answer. It will be eternal damnation in eternal torment in the "lake of fire." (Revelation 14:9-11) Jesus was teaching that if you want to trust in the world's system of doing things, then the world will definitely take care of you and bring you along with them to their "everlasting habitation" - in hell. The unjust steward in our parable may have been shrewd and successful by the standards of this evil generation, this evil world. He and this evil world will revel in their deceitfulness. They will "revel" together, unfortunately, all the way to hell.

Jesus continues teaching in the context of this parable with the following scriptures - Luke 16:10-13. We will use the Amplified Version for I believe it helps us to get a better understanding of what Jesus was saying in these scriptures.. *"He who is **faithful** in a very little [thing] is **faithful** also in much, and he who is dishonest {and} unjust in a very little [thing] is dishonest {and} unjust also in much. Therefore if you have **not been faithful** in the [case of] unrighteous mammon (deceitful riches, money, possessions), who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have **not proved faithful** in that which belongs to another [whether God or man], who will give you that which is your own [that is, the true riches]? No servant is able to serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stand by {and} be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (riches, or anything in which you trust and on which you rely)." Notice, that in this section of scripture, Jesus uses the term "faithful" four times.*

Obviously, Jesus is trying to drive home the point of being **faithful**. In the parable in which Jesus just gave, the "unjust" steward continued being **unfaithful** to his master even after his "unjustness" was exposed. He refused to repent from His "unfaithfulness. Jesus teaches that if you cannot be found faithful even in "unrighteous mammon" (as the "unjust" steward was not found faithful towards his master) then who will trust you with "true riches;" the "true riches" meaning the things of God and His Kingdom.

He goes on to say in this same context, that if you have been shown to **not be faithful** with things that belong to any one else (God or man), Jesus asks how can you be trusted with anything that has been given to you? Even the things that you think you have because of your "unjust and unscrupulous ways" will ultimately be taken from you and lost.

Jesus then goes on to say the scriptures that we are all familiar with concerning "serving two masters." The concept here is that you cannot be faithful and say you are doing the things of God when you have an incorrect attitude of heart that is selfish, greedy and covetous - which means that you are really only serving yourself, not God. We see that it was these words that got the attention and the ire of the Pharisees and scribes.

Luke 16:14 tells us, *"And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him."* Here is where the "rubber hits the road." Jesus was speaking and teaching to the twelve disciples, the future leaders of what would become known as the Church, the Body of Christ. He was teaching them, as well as exhorting them, to be careful not to get greedy, covetous or "unjust" in their new roles of being leaders within this new move of God.

The Pharisees, who were eavesdropping, heard the whole parable and teaching. They knew exactly what Jesus was saying and who He was referring to – the "unjust steward" was referring to them. As you can imagine, they were quite upset with Jesus. They were entrusted with God's "goods," His people. Yet, they became unscrupulous in their ways with God's people. Now, through Jesus, their deceitful ways were being exposed and they were actually given an opportunity to repent. However, they were rejecting the opportunity and continued to deceive the people.

Jesus proceeds to say it outright. Yes, He was most definitely speaking of them, the religious leaders. He was exhorting His disciples to stay away from the faulty role model of these leaders as well as their incorrect attitude of heart towards the people of God who they were entrusted with. He was exposing their incorrect attitude of heart concerning God's people by exposing their own self-righteousness, greed and covetousness. He was saying that these religious leaders were at that dangerous place of being "children of this world." Their only reward will be from other "children of this world" and that their end result will be the "everlasting habitation" reserved for those "children of the world." Hmmm....

We see this as we continue to read Luke 16:15-18 - *"And he said unto them, **Ye are they** which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery."*

Jesus goes on to describe a litany of items to show and express that they, the religious leaders entrusted by God to His people, were being "unjust" stewards of God's Kingdom. They justified themselves before men and made themselves the "high and mighty" ones over the people. Jesus held no punches in telling them that this is an abomination to God and He is well aware of what was going on - "**God knows your hearts.**"

He continues to say that they were given the Law, the Prophets. God sent John the Baptist who came as the forerunner to the Messiah to tell them what needed to be done to enter into the Kingdom. Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God was there right in front of them exhorting what they needed to do but they rejected Him as well. They needed to repent, turn from their wicked ways and turn towards their God. The entirety of scripture points us all to do this.

When Jesus uses the term "*presses in*," it is not meant to be in a good sense. What He means is that men strive and try to enter into God's Kingdom forcibly as if to break down the gates of heaven and enter into the Kingdom in their own way – totally trying to usurp God's authority and precepts. In Matthew 11:12 Jesus states, "*...that the Kingdom suffereth violence and the violent take it (heaven) by force.*" Again, this means that the sinful nature of man is bringing man to actually be at war with God and His ways and want to take over heaven itself. They want to enter in their way, not God's. Wasn't this Lucifer's desire? Hmmmm.....

Unfortunately, men strive and try to "*press in*," force their way into God's Kingdom through and by their own means, ways, ideas, false doctrines and teachings. They have the faulty thinking that they can "bust down the door to the throne room of God" and come before Him their way, and on their terms, not God's way. It reminds us of "The Tower of Babel" where the people wanted to build a tower into heaven and forcibly tear down heaven's doors to overthrow God. It reminds us of Cain's faulty offering and wanting to bring an offering in the way that he wanted to give God, regardless if it was what God had wanted or not. Again, doesn't this all remind us of Satan's attempt to overthrow God and usurp His throne and His authority.

Jesus reminds them that God's Word, His commandments and His ways, are forever and will never "pass away." He quotes one of the Ten Commandments concerning adultery caused by divorce. Men were divorcing their wives and the Pharisees were either looking the other way or possibly being bribed to "bless the divorce" saying that it was justifiable in the eyes of God, which it was not. This passage by Jesus concerning adultery (Luke 16:18) is actually setting up and pointing to the lesson of the next "parable" that Jesus is about to go into which will be next month's "Parable of the Month." Stay tuned....

Going back to our parable of the "Unjust Steward" along with the teaching of Jesus that follows, we see that Jesus was exhorting His disciples, who would soon become the leaders of the Body of Christ that their leadership should not be as such. God's Kingdom is much different than that of this generation's, this world's "children of the world." He was warning the religious leaders of that day of their own impending downfall and doom.

This warning is just as relevant to the leadership within Body of Christ today as well as to all of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus and call Jesus their Lord and Savior. The leadership in the Body of Christ today would do well to learn and heed the lesson of this most unorthodox parable - beware of being an "unjust steward" over the things of God in which He has entrusted His leaders with - His beloved children, the beloved Bride of Christ, His people - those of the "Household of faith." Beware of doing things in the world's economy of doing things (children of the world.) Rather, we need to be doing things and bringing forth His Kingdom as "children of the light!!!"