

MOSJ Meeting
Gospel of Luke Chapter 16
Verses 1-13
September 14, 2010

The Parable of the
Dishonest Steward
by
Damian Bell

Context:

1. This parable immediately follows the parable of the wayward son, and also deals with mishandling earthly possessions.
2. The parable contains three main lessons Jesus is teaching to His disciples, and by extension to each of us. As we go through the verses, each lesson will be revealed.

Verse 1: Then He said to His disciples, “ A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property.”

First, these are direct words from Jesus to the disciples. The rich man in this case is representative of God, who has entrusted each of us as stewards over the gifts He has given us. Are we squandering God’s gifts or being good stewards.

Verse 2: He summoned him and said, “What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.”

My first thought was how the master discovered the steward had squandered his property. Then it occurred to me that God already knows if we have been good or bad stewards. The master fires the steward and asks for a full accounting of his management of the masters’ possessions. How would each of us grade out if we had to make a full accounting now?

Verse 3: The steward said to himself “ What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg.”

The realization that he has been fired causes immediate reflection by the steward. Like many of us, he is now facing the consequences of poor choices. He is not happy about his future prospects and does not want a life of hard labor, but is also too proud to beg, in spite of his impending dire circumstances. St. Paul reminded us that pride inflates, whereas love builds up. A favorite Christian artist of mine has a song with a verse that says “ Pride, what a precious waste of time.”

Verse 4: “ I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.”

Who are the “they” he is referring to? We have a hint here that the steward has somehow very quickly thought out a plan of action to survive.

Verses 5 & 6: He called in his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said "How much do you owe my master?" He replied " One hundred measures of olive oil." He said to him " Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty."

Whoa...what in the world is going on here? In researching the passage I discovered that stewards were known for charging the debtors of their masters an additional fee which they kept for themselves. In order to gain the favor of the debtors, he has wiped out his commission. As a point of reference, a measure is described as about 8-9 gallons.

Verse 7: Then to another he said. " And you, how much do you owe?" He replied " One hundred kors of wheat." He said to him, " Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty."

A kor is thought to be equal to 10-12 bushels of wheat. Even though this steward was about to be fired, he was exercising great authority over his master's property.

Verse 7 commentary continued:

Up to the time of his final accounting with the master, he is exercising his free will to forego his commissions to improve his future, much like we freely make choices right up to our final day and judgment. Are we making good choices?

Verse 8: And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. “ For the children of this world are more diligent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.”

It struck me as implausible that the dishonest steward would be praised by the master for his shrewdness in making the final accounting, but the second part of the verse adds clarity. Jesus was saying that unbelievers fare well in their own world, whereas believers are often unwise when it comes to spiritual affairs. Some of the commentary I read likened the dishonest steward to the Pharisees, in that the Pharisees had been entrusted with being the spiritual stewards of Israel, but had squandered their master's property by being poor leaders.

Verse 9: “ I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

What is the underlying meaning of this direct quote from Jesus? Scholars believe that Jesus was saying to use what material wealth we possess to provide for those less fortunate in order to lead those people to Christ. In the end (death), material wealth fails us all, but we will have stored up treasures in heaven and will be welcomed into that realm.

First Lesson: Act prudently at all times with all things God has entrusted to us. Just as unbelievers are shrewd in matters of the world, we can be shrewd in spiritual matters for our own salvation.

Reference: First Timothy; Chapter 6 , verses 17-19

Verse 10: “The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones.

Second Lesson – To be constantly faithful in all that we do. Whether we are in the role of father, husband, brother, son, co-worker, employer or employee, we should strive to do the right thing. This attention to being faithful in small matters can be thought of as relating to taking care of business with the property we have been given here on earth.

Verse 11: “If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth.”

True wealth references the inheritance we will see after death and entrance into heaven. Earthly riches can not compare to the riches that await us in heaven.

Verse 12: "If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours?"

The implication to me was that if we are not to be trusted with what belongs to God or man, how can we be trusted to receive the inheritance of eternal life, which is ours to claim. However, we must be worthy to receive this gift.

Verse 13: " No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Mammon is a Greek word translated as "that in which we trust."

The context seems to indicate that Jesus elevated mammon to a status of a god. It is our task to choose which of these we will serve, the true God or some false god, such as wealth, power, sex, or anything that deflects us away from God. One leads to eternal salvation, the other to eternal damnation.

Third Lesson: We cannot serve God, while also being a slave to any type of false god.

Thoughts for Discussion:

The lessons of these verses pose a difficult balancing act for many men. We are responsible to our families to provide for them, to prepare for that time in life when we can no longer work or may not wish to work.

I often struggle with the amount of time I spend taking care of those responsibilities as compared to the amount of time I spend focusing on God. Too often it seems that life gets in the way of my attempts to draw nearer to God.

God provided each of us with the things we have, so it is right to be a good steward over that property. It is also right to keep our focus on Him and live according to his teachings as best we can.

It is my prayer that each of us in this room and for all men struggling to be models of St. Joseph, will ask for and receive the help of the Holy Spirit to reach that worthy goal.