

Luke 16:1-13

16 Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’

³ “The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg— ⁴ I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’

⁵ “So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

⁶ “‘Nine hundred gallons^[a] of olive oil,’ he replied.

“The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.’

⁷ “Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’

“‘A thousand bushels^[b] of wheat,’ he replied.

“He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

⁸ “The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

¹⁰ “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?

¹³ “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP, ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE IS ABOUT BEING FAITHFUL TO GOD IN USING WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN INTO OUR CARE.

THIS INCLUDES THINGS LIKE: TIME, TALENTS, MONEY, RELATIONSHIPS, AND ESPECIALLY LOVE.

THE PARABLE JESUS TOLD ABOUT A DISHONEST STEWARD HAS THIS AS THE MAIN POINT OF HIS STORY, WHICH HE WANTS THOSE WHO HEAR IT TO GRASP.

WE ARE MEANT TO VIEW OUR RESOURCES NOT SELFISHLY OR JEALOUSLY, BUT INSTEAD AS GOD’S POSSESSIONS GIVEN INTO OUR CARE.

AND ONE WAY TO HELP US DO THIS IS TO THINK AND TALK ABOUT OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THINGS WE OFTEN CLING TO AS OUR MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCES, LIKE MONEY.

THE PROBLEM IS NOT HAVING MONEY OR OTHER KIND OF WEALTH, BUT HOW WE USE OR MISUSE WHAT WE HAVE.

AND THAT OF COURSE IS INFLUENCED BY OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOD.

WHILE MONEY IS A GOOD AND NECESSARY THING TO HAVE, WE MUST NEVER MAKE AN IDOL OF IT, OR USE IT IN WAYS THAT DO NOT PLEASE GOD.

FOR EXAMPLE: A MIDDLE-CLASS MAN MARRIED A VERY WEALTHY WOMAN, AND THEY SEEMED WELL MATCHED EXCEPT FOR ONE THING.

THE WOMAN LIKED TO REMIND HER NEW HUSBAND ABOUT HOW SHE WAS FINANCIALLY PROVIDING FOR HIM.

AND SO, SHE SAID THINGS LIKE: “IF IT WERE NOT FOR MY MONEY, WE WOULDN’T BE HERE, IN THIS MANSION”.

THEN, WHEN THE BIG FLAT SCREENED TV, WITH A DVD, DVR, STEREO AND COMPUTER SYSTEM ALL IN ONE ARRIVED, SHE AGAIN REMINDED HIM THAT SHE PAID FOR IT.

SHE REPEATED THESE KINDS OF STATEMENTS ABOUT THE REST OF THEIR EXPENSIVE MATERIAL POSSESSIONS, AND EACH TIME THE MAN DID NOT REPLY.

BUT FINALLY, ONE DAY AFTER SHE FINISHED ONE OF THOSE STATEMENTS, HE SAID, “YOU ARE RIGHT HONEY, AND IF IT WERE NOT FOR YOUR MONEY I WOULDN’T BE HERE!”

SADLY, THE COUPLE SAW MONEY IN WAYS THAT WOULD NOT PLEASE GOD, BECAUSE THEY LOVED MONEY MORE THAN ONE ANOTHER.

SHE SAW IT AS A MEANS OF POWER OVER HER HUSBAND, AND HE SAW MONEY AS THE REASON HE WAS HER HUSBAND.

LUKE 16:14 MENTIONS THAT THE PHARISEES WHO WERE AROUND JESUS, WERE “LOVERS OF MONEY.”

AND THIS MAY BE WHY JESUS TOLD A COUPLE OF STORIES ABOUT ONE’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS, AND USE OF, WORLDLY RICHES.

THE PARABLE WERE HEARD TODAY IS ABOUT A DISHONEST STEWARD WHO MISMANAGED A RICH MAN’S FUNDS, WAS FIRED, AND YET WAS CLEVER ENOUGH TO PROVIDE FOR HIS OWN FUTURE.

THE ODD THING IS, JESUS SEEMS TO SUGGEST WE CAN LEARN FROM THAT STEWARD.

IT CERTAINLY IS STRANGE TO BE PRESENTED, BY JESUS, WITH A DISHONEST ROLE MODEL.

IN FACT, THE IDEA IS PARADOXICAL BECAUSE IT IS CONTRADICTORY TO WHAT WE KNOW IS RIGHT.

IT DOES NOT MAKE SENSE THAT THE UNJUST STEWARD SEEMS TO COME OUT ON TOP, AND EVEN IS PRAISED BY HIS MASTER FOR HIS ILLEGAL OPERATIONS, AND YET HE IS.

WHAT THEN, WE MAY WONDER, IS JESUS TRYING TO TEACH THROUGH THIS PARABLE AND THE STATEMENTS THE SAVIOR MADE FOLLOWING IT.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY, WE SHOULD NOTE, IS NOT THAT WE SHOULD COPY THAT STEWARD’S BEHAVIOR.

INSTEAD, JESUS CHALLENGES HIS FOLLOWERS TO BE AS SHREWD WITH THE TREASURES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, AS THAT MAN WAS WITH WORLDLY TREASURES.

SO, ONE REASON FOR TELLING THE STORY IS THAT WHILE WE SHOULD NOT ACTUALLY USE THE STEWARD AS A ROLE MODEL TO FOLLOW, WE STILL CAN LEARN FROM HIM.

BUT FIRST, WE NEED TO LOOK AT OURSELVES AND REALIZE THAT ALL OF US HAVE AT TIMES MISMANAGED THE RESOURCES AND OTHER BLESSINGS GOD HAS GIVEN US.

CONSEQUENTLY, WHEN WE LOOK AT THIS STEWARD’S SQUANDERING OF WHAT HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR, WE’RE ALSO, IN A WAY, LOOKING AT OURSELVES

REMEMBER, WHILE SCRIPTURE TEACHES THAT ALTHOUGH THE GOOD THINGS IN LIFE ARE MEANT TO BE APPRECIATED AND ENJOYED, GOD DOES NOT GIVE US WHAT WE HAVE FOR OUR OWN BENEFIT ALONE.

INSTEAD, WE ARE SUPPOSE TO USE ALL OUR BLESSINGS IN WAYS THAT DEMONSTRATE GRATITUDE TO GOD, WHICH INCLUDES HELPING OTHERS.

THE PARABLE JESUS TOLD WAS INTENDED TO BRING THIS POINT TO OUR ATTENTION.

IT DOES SO BY TEACHING THAT UNLIKE THE STEWARD IN THE STORY—WE ARE SUPPOSE TO BE FAITHFUL MANAGERS OF ALL OUR RESOURCES-MATERIAL, AS WELL AS, SPIRITUAL.

NATURALLY, IT IS WORLDLY WEALTH OR MAMMON IN PARTICULAR, PEOPLE HAVE THE MOST TROUBLE HANDLING. INDEED, SOMEONE WROTE ABOUT THIS PROBLEM: “MONEY IS A GREAT SERVANT, BUT A TERRIBLE MASTER.”

AND THAT OF COURSE IS AT THE HEART OF JESUS’ TEACHING AS LUKE 16:13 WARNS- WE CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS. WE CANNOT SERVE BOTH MONEY AND GOD.

SO, LET US LOOK NOW TO PARABLE SINCE IN IT THE UNSAVORY STEWARD SHOWS US THE BENEFITS AND DANGERS OF WORLDLY WEALTH.

IN THE PARABLE, THE MAN IS FOUND TO HAVE SQUANDERED SOME PROPERTY THAT WAS NOT HIS, BUT WAS ONLY ENTRUSTED TO HIS CARE.

WHEN HIS EMPLOYER HEARD ABOUT THIS, HE FIRED THE STEWARD WITHOUT EVEN GIVING HIM A CHANCE TO MAKE EXCUSES OR DEFEND HIMSELF.

BUT NOTICE, THE RICH MAN DID NOT SEEK TO PROSECUTE THE DISHONEST MANAGER, AND HE EVEN GAVE THE MAN TIME TO PUT HIS RECORDS IN ORDER.

THIS ACT OF GRACE, GAVE THE STEWARD AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE FOR HIS OWN FUTURE.

AND SO, AFTER HE LEARNED THAT HE HAD LOST HIS POSITION, HE THOUGHT ABOUT HIS OPTIONS AND ACTED QUICKLY.

HE REDUCED THE DEBTS OTHERS OWED TO HIS MASTER EVEN THOUGH HE NO LONGER HAD THE AUTHORITY TO DO SO.

THE STEWARD'S REASONING WAS --THE DEBTORS, WHO DID NOT KNOW HE HAD BEEN FIRED, WOULD ASSUME HE HAD PERSUADED THE OWNER TO GIVE THE REDUCTION.

THEN, EVEN IF THEY FOUND OUT HE DID NOT HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO DO IT, THE DEBTORS WOULD STILL OWE THE STEWARD A FAVOR IN RETURN.

WE SHOULD ALSO NOTE, THAT THIS LANDOWNER DID NOT SEEK TO GET FULL PAYMENT FROM HIS TENANTS, PROBABLY BECAUSE IT WOULD MAKE HIM LOOK GREEDY.

FURTHERMORE, WHILE THE RICH MAN COULD HAVE HAD THE STEWARD JAILED FOR REDUCING THE DEBTS, HE DID NOT DO SO, BUT LET THINGS STAND AS THEY WERE.

THOSE TWO CHOICES MADE, BY THE MAN WHO LOST MONEY DUE TO THE STEWARD'S ACTIONS, SHOWS HIM TO BE A KIND AND GODLY MAN.

IN THIS SENSE IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT HE SHOWED SOME DEGREE OF MERCY TOWARDS THE STEWARD.

BUT WHAT IS SURPRISING AND CONFUSING IS- TO HEAR ABOUT THE MASTER OF THE STEWARD PRAISING HIM FOR HIS INNOVATIVE THINKING AND DECISIVE ACTION.

HOWEVER, HIS PRAISE OF THE STEWARD, IS NOT OVER HIS UNJUST AND ILLEGAL ACTIONS, BUT RATHER FOR THE MAN'S SHREWDNESS IN PROVIDING FOR HIS OWN FUTURE.

YES INDEED, HE WAS PERCEPTIVE ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT HE COULD AND COULD NOT DO, AND FOUND A WAY TO ENSURE HE WOULD SURVIVE AND MAY BE EVEN PROSPER.

AND WE CAN LEARN FROM THE STEWARD'S CLEVERNESS AND DECISIVENESS.

HE WAS SKILLED IN USING THE RESOURCES HE HAD LEFT TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS.

THEREFORE, LIKE THE STEWARD WAS INFLUENCED BY THE DANGERS AND POSSIBILITIES HE SAW IN HIS FUTURE, SO ALSO SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE INFLUENCED OUR VISION.

LISTEN AGAIN TO WHAT JESUS SAID IN VERSE 8: "FOR THE PEOPLE OF THIS WORLD ARE SHREWDER IN DEALING WITH THEIR OWN KIND THAN ARE THE PEOPLE OF THE LIGHT."

NOTICE JESUS WAS SPEAKING HERE ABOUT HIS DISCIPLES NEEDING TO LIVE IN THE WORLD AND BE WISE ABOUT THE WAYS OF THE WORLD, WHILE NOT BEING OF THE WORLD.

THIS INCLUDES OUR AWARENESS, ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR INVOLVING MONEY AND OTHER KINDS OF MATERIAL WEALTH AND RESOURCES.

HOW THEN, CAN WE AS CHRISTIANS COPY THE STEWARD'S CLEVERNESS, BUT NOT HIS DISHONESTY?

FIRST, WE REMEMBER GOD IS GRACIOUS TOWARDS US. AND JESUS TELLS US ONE OF THE WAYS WE CAN DO THIS INVOLVES RELATIONSHIPS AND MONEY.

SPECIFICALLY, JESUS IS SUGGESTING IN TODAY'S READING WE SHOULD USE WORLDLY TREASURES TO INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

BUT IT ISN'T JUST MONEY WE NEED TO INVEST IN THE WORK OF GOD'S KINGDOM, IT IS ALSO -OUR TIME, OUR SKILLS, OUR LOVE, AS WELL AS OUR PRAYERS.

WE ARE TO USE ALL OF THOSE THINGS, TO MAKE FRIENDS FOR JESUS BY SHARING HIS LOVE IN TANGIBLE WAYS.

THINK ABOUT THE DIFFERENCE IT COULD MAKE IF, WHEN IT COMES TO SHARING THE LOVE OF JESUS, CHRISTIANS WERE AS CLEVER AS THE STEWARD WAS IN THE PARABLE.

WHAT BLESSING IT WOULD BE IF CHRISTIANS WERE AS DECISIVE WITH ALL OF THE TREASURES THEY POSSESS NOW, AS THE STEWARD WAS WITH HIS MASTER'S MONEY.

WE WOULD CHANGE NOT ONLY OURSELVES, AND THE CHURCH, BUT ALSO OUR EXAMPLE WOULD IMPACT THE WORLD IN POSITIVE WAYS.

WE WOULD BE SHOWING OTHERS THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, AND HOW HE CAN AND DOES TRANSFORM LIVES IN A WAY EVEN THE MOST WORLDLY MINDED COULD NOT MISS.

BUT REMEMBER, WHEN WE USE OUR BLESSINGS AND RESOURCES IN THIS WAY, WE DO NOT BUY OUR SALVATION, NOR DO WE MAKE GOD A DEBTOR TO US.

INSTEAD, WE BOTH SHOW OURSELVES TO BE GOOD STEWARDS OF WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN US, AND WE ALSO DEMONSTRATE OUR GRATITUDE TO THE LORD.

THE GOOD NEWS FOR US IS- THAT JESUS PROMISED THOSE WHO ARE FAITHFUL TO GOD WITH MATERIAL THINGS WILL BE SPIRITUALLY BLESSED IN IMMEASURABLE WAYS.

THESE BLESSINGS, WHICH MIGHT BE VIEWED AS REWARDS, ARE MORE CORRECTLY THE SPIRITUAL OUT-GROWTH AND BENEFITS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.

THEREFORE, JESUS ADVISES HIS DISCIPLES OF EVERY PLACE AND TIME TO CONSIDER OUR OPTIONS AND CHOOSE GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE.

OR TO PARAPHRASE ANOTHER ONE OF JESUS' STATEMENTS: "SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND EVERYTHING ELSE THAT REALLY MATTERS WILL ALSO BE GIVEN TO YOU."

THERE IS A HYMN IN OUR HYMNAL THAT OFFERS A PRAYERFUL SUMMARY OF THE MESSAGE JESUS WANTS HIS FOLLOWERS TO RECEIVE THROUGH HIS TEACHINGS:

THE SONG IS CALLED: "WE GIVE THEE BUT THINE OWN", AND IT DESCRIBES OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO BE GOOD STEWARDS, AND THE BLESSING DOING SO CAN BRING TO THE WORLD.

"WE GIVE THEE BUT THINE OWN, WHATE'ER THE GIFT MAY BE; ALL THAT WE HAVE IS THINE ALONE, A TRUST, O LORD, FROM THEE.

MAY WE THY BOUNTIES THUS AS STEWARDS TRUE RECEIVE, AND GLADLY, AS THOU BLESSEST US, TO THEE OUR FIRST FRUITS GIVE.

TO COMFORT AND TO BLESS, TO FIND A BALM FOR WOE, TO TEND THE LONELY IN DISTRESS IS ANGELS' WORK BELOW.

THE CAPTIVE TO RELEASE, TO GOD THE LOST TO BRING, TO TEACH THE WAY OF LIFE AND PEACE- IT IS A CHRIST-LIKE THING.

AND WE BELIEVE THY WORD, THOUGH DIM OUR FAITH MAY BE; WHATE'ER FOR THINE WE DO, O LORD, WE DO IT UNTO THEE."

MAY WE LEARN TO LIVE IN WAYS LIKE THESE THAT PLEASE AND GLORIFY GOD. THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD WE PRAY. AMEN.

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