

You Can't Serve God and Mammon

A lot of confusion has stemmed from the parable of the unjust servant because our interpretations have been based on tradition and law. Recently I read this parable and I saw something that I have never seen before.

Luke 16:1 And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

2 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.

3 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.

4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

6 And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

7 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.

8 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.

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.

10 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.

11 If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon [the value of a so called unrighteous man] who will commit to your trust the true riches?

12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

13 No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

14 And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.

15 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.

A parable is a short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson. In this particular parable, the rich ruler typifies God, and the steward represents the Pharisees. A steward is one who manages the affairs of another; thus the parable is designed to draw attention to the way that the religious leaders of the day were [and are] carrying out the work of God or the work of the kingdom.

The ruler accused the steward of wasting his goods.

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The steward had to change the way that he dealt with the debtors. He knew that he would be forced to live among them once his job was terminated. He went to each debtor and befriended him or her by settling their debts with amounts less than what they owed.

Luke 16:3 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.

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It is interesting because it was at this point that the ruler commended the steward for the way that he handled things.

Luke 16:8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because

done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

In the beginning the steward was accused of wasting the rich ruler's goods. I thought it was about the money. But it was not about the money. When the ruler commended the steward for his wise behavior the steward had actually caused the ruler to lose money.

I believe that Jesus is telling this parable to point out the way that the Pharisees were treating God's people. God is not interested in gaining monetary wealth. He is interested in building relationships. The Pharisees held the letter of the law over people's heads and refused to ease their burdens. Matthew 23:4 Their philosophy made the true things of the kingdom inaccessible to men. Matthew 23:13 Up until the time that the steward realized that he would lose his job, he was more than likely a cruel taskmaster that had no mercy on the debtors. Luke 18:9-12. Christians often have an us and them mentality. We live in our own little bubble and shut everyone else out!

We are all debtors with a debt that we cannot pay. The kingdom is not about paying our debt. It is about forgiving debts. Matthew 6:12

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 habitation.

Jesus, as the Son of God did the work of his Father and thus the work of the kingdom. He approached people with mercy and compassion. In this parable he was admonishing the Pharisees to do the same. Matthew 12:7 The rich ruler commended the steward for having mercy on the debtors. The true wealth of the kingdom of the rich ruler was contained in the people of the kingdom and they were the goods that the steward was wasting.

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

12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

What is Jesus referring to when he talks about being faithful to that which is least? Consider the light this scripture sheds on the matter:

Luke 22:25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

27 For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

He is saying, if you can be faithful to minister to those in my kingdom that you consider to be less important, you will experience the true riches of the kingdom.

Luke 16:13 No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon [from Strong's Concordance-mammon-avarice-a strong desire to have or get money.]

Jesus concludes by summing it all up. If you want to serve God, you are going to have to get your focus off of yourselves and what you have to gain and you are going to have to see and treat others the way that I do.

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