

THE UNJUST SERVANT/ STEWARD

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, 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.

Does anything strike you as being either unusual, or even downright wrong about what occurs in this parable? Let's begin at verse one.

The word in verse one translated 'was accused' is:

1225- diaballo, to accuse falsely. From diabolos (1228) a false accuser, used of Satan, the devil who falsely accuses us before the throne of God. Therefore, this Parable concerns a Good Steward who is falsely accused of mismanagement, or wrongdoing before his master. In fact, it can be argued that it is the master, who is unjust, not the servant.

We are called upon to be Good Stewards and several other Parables, make this connection. So, I believe that the steward in this Parable is meant to represent US as believers and is designed to teach us how to respond to such devil inspired, unjust accusations that may come our way. (verse three)

Note how in verse two, the master says only that he 'hears' this accusation, yet he has already passed judgement.

Where was the evidence that this steward had done anything wrong? The master, listened to the gossip and murmurings of others, but there is NO evidence that he ever INVESTIGATED the accusations against his servant!!

In verse four, the word translated 'put out' is:

3179- methistemi, which means not just to remove, but to remove from the world. It is the same word used to refer to moving from the Kingdom of Darkness, into the Kingdom of Light. (Col1:13)

It would not be incorrect then to see two inter-related themes being developed in this Parable; one aimed at the unsaved and the other at the saved. What is our duty before we leave this world; what must the unsaved do before being removed from Darkness into Light? To me, the over-riding/ unifying theme is FORGIVENESS.

As we examine verses 5-7, we are reminded of Mat 6:12. The same root word is used. However, it is interesting to observe that the emphasis in forgiveness changes slightly depending upon whether it applies to Christians or non-Christians. If, as I believe, the steward represents believers, then the Parable here emphasises our responsibility to forgive. As God has forgiven us, so must we forgive others. Also, while we cannot even begin to repay our God for what He has done for us, we need to be about His work; returning what we can; making whatever contribution to the Kingdom we are able to achieve. Consider further the Parable of the Talents which deals with the related issue of using what God has given us to the best of our ability.

The other side of the coin is also a valid interpretation. For the unsaved, the issue of forgiveness relates to God's undeserved forgiveness of their sin which is available through Jesus. The unsaved have a need, not only for this forgiveness, but also to get their lives/accounts in order before they have to give an accounting to the Master.

Verse 8 is important and difficult. The key word translated ‘unjust’ is: 93- adikia. The phrase is better translated- Steward of Unrighteousness. Here, by examining the context brought out in verse 9; ‘Mammon of Unrighteousness, we see first, that it is the same word in both verses (adikia). Then, the word ‘mammon’ here means: wealth, riches, material possessions- the gods of prosperity as exemplified by the so called prosperity doctrines of the Word of Faith and similar movements.

It seems logical then, to equate the word adikia (unjust) in verse 8 with the money (mammon) the steward was dealing with, rather than applying it to the steward himself. For, the Love of money is the root of all evil. The servant is not unrighteous, but what he has to deal with for his master is. Yet, by attempting to bring benefit to his master and others in the world, he is commended or praised by his master.

The second half of the verse is even more challenging. We see two opposing expressions: ‘children, or sons of the world’ (this present age; those who are devoted to the philosophies of this age) and ‘children, or sons of Light’ (those enlightened by the true light of God; our Lord Jesus, the Light of the world.)

Yet, we are informed that not only has the steward done ‘wisely’, but that the children of the world, are ‘wiser’ than the children of light. Obviously then, we must examine the word ‘wise’.

There are two main Greek words that are translated ‘wise’- sophos, and phronimos. The ones in verse 8 use forms of phronimos. What is the difference?

Let me quote Dr. Spiros Zodhiates- “Both words refer to the use of intelligence and the wise use of one’s means to accomplish something. The difference lies in the ends which one is attempting to accomplish. The word ‘sophos’ is used only when the thing that will be accomplished

is good, but the word ‘phronimos’ is most often used when the end that will be accomplished is evil.”

Therefore, we see that the children of this world are better at using their intelligence to accomplish evil, than are the children of light.

Verse 9 contains an intriguing command to make friends of this unrighteous mammon. It could be argued with some justification that this echoes Paul’s later statement of becoming all things to all people, so as to win the lost. We must be friends with the people/things of this world in order to advance the cause of the Kingdom, while not becoming a part of them. While this is probably a valid interpretation, using scripture to interpret scripture yields a deeper meaning. Verses 10-12 explain what our Lord meant in verse 9.

Note carefully, that the wealth and riches of this world are called the LEAST. That gives them their true position despite what many so called Christian leaders try to tell us. Anyone who preaches about money, is dealing with something Jesus says is the least important thing we should consider. We still have to be faithful good stewards with this money, but we should not treat it as being in anyway important in our Christian lives. Its purpose, as explained in verse 11 is to prepare us to handle the ‘true or genuine riches’.

A minor point in passing. The word ‘riches’ doesn’t appear in the original Greek, but is implied by the context. However, without it, we have the additional inference, that the mammon of this world is not genuine, but a counterfeit. So much for the prosperity doctrine teachers!!

Jesus draws the Parable to a close with the well known statements of verse 13, which are found also in Mat 6:24 that we cannot serve both God

and mammon. The wealth of this world, can serve us, but it **MUST** never become our master. We should not be seeking it, we should be seeking God as Mat 6:33 clearly states.

In conclusion, in verse 14 of Luke 16, the Pharisees objected to his statements. Jesus' reply in verse 15 is blunt and straight to the point. He says 'that which is highly esteemed among men' and I believe He is referring to money here, 'is abomination in the sight of God.'

Let us be good stewards then of what the Lord has entrusted to us here on earth, but let us never forget that our true treasure is in Heaven. Remember the importance of Forgiveness in every aspect of our lives and let us make friends of the unfriendly, those who are at enmity with God with the intent and purpose of winning them to Christ. And above all, let us dedicate ourselves to studying the Word that we may know Him and not be led astray by any wicked wind of doctrine. May the Lord Bless you all.