

The Unjust Steward.

The parable Jesus told is simple in its narrative, but not so simple to understand. It would have been easy to follow at the time, to the audience. But since then, there has been much false doctrine and misunderstandings that has made some of the parables Jesus told difficult to

understand at first – like for example the parable of the rich man and Lazarus that we looked at recently. But as always although Jesus' parables are simple, they are multi layered as would be expected as being the product of the Holy Spirit with many more lessons contained than at first meets the eye.

The following is taken from the KJV (and slightly updated).

The parable:

And Jesus 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 you? give an account of thy stewardship; for you may be no longer steward. 3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord takes 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 do you owe my lord? 6 And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take your bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. 7 Then said he to another, And how much do you owe? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take your bill, and write eighty. 8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely:

Jesus then comments:

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 you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Jesus makes further teachings:

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.

Shrewd Manager / Unjust Steward

Some translations describe the central character in the parable a *shrewd manager*, as opposed to the *unjust steward* in verse 8 of the KJV. The word translated unjust is in Greek *adikia* which means wrongfulness, injustice, unrighteousness, iniquity, and does not mean shrewd or clever in any way. Unjust explains exactly the

character and general demeanour of the man exactly. The Greek word translated as steward or manager is *oikonomos* meaning a house distributor, or overseer. Rich Jews in Jesus' day, and indeed people in general would hire a trusted administrator to manage the day to day running of the house and estate, paying the bills and purchasing the necessary goods required. Such a custom was in place for centuries.

An example of a House Manager:

We can think of Joseph in Egypt, doing exactly that job for his boss Potiphar, and he shows us how the job was to be done, with complete integrity, as Joseph said when he refused the temptation of dishonesty: Genesis 39:8 *But he refused and said to his master's wife Look, my master does not give any thought to his household with me here and he has committed all that he has to my hand.* Joseph, a man of faith was a Child of Light and ran that household not even as if it was his own, but as if it belonged to God. He saw God as the ultimate Overseer, and trusted Him completely with his life, and knew that God would give him the greatest inheritance ever, so that all that he ever did - he did it as unto the Lord, including being a Just Steward and a Shrewd Manager over Potiphar's house and over the whole of Egypt. Joseph maintained a consistent approach because he saw the end destination.

Back to the Parable:

This parable shows how the Rich Owner of the house was informed by others of the steward being a bad manager of his affairs and so he called the steward to make a full account of himself, but also at the same time told him that he was going to lose his job. This is an interesting point, and stops the point of view of understanding the parable that the rich owner is God, and the unjust steward is a

typical member of the ecclesia. Because Proverbs 18:13 *He that answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame unto him.* Even under modern employment law this scriptural teaching is upheld that judgement is passed after someone has been given an opportunity to give account of themselves. Judgement is not passed until afterwards. This is the teaching of Jesus John 7:24: *Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.* Also 1 Timothy 5:19 *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.* Deuteronomy 13:14 emphasises the need for an examination first before judgment is passed *Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain...* So the rich Households in this case seems to be more like the Scribes and Pharisees who lived in Jesus day who insisted others below them carry all the burdens, but they themselves did nothing (Matthew 23:4) but were so quick to condemn others.

Wasting

The steward was accused of wasting his master's goods. Jesus in another parable spoke of how a son in receiving his inheritance wasted it, and had to go and eat pig's food to survive. That man wasted his own goods, but because of his attitude was given another chance. Wasting goods then, as a theme is seen by Jesus as being a negative thing. Wasting time, wasting opportunity, wasting life. Jesus expects his disciples to make the very best of the opportunities given to them – as seen in the parable of the pounds and the parable of the talents which we are to look at in the future God willing. He expects his disciples to be resourceful and energetic in doing the very best for their Master – seen when he carried out the miracle of the loaves and fishes in John 6: 12 we can read *12 When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that*

nothing be lost. There was nothing to be left to waste. It is the same with the preaching of the gospel the bread of life, at every opportunity crumbs of the Word of God should be shared with those who sit under the Master's Table.

Snowflake

The steward hearing that he was going to lose his job, was all of a panic. He had no back up plan. He couldn't dig, and to beg he was ashamed. Not being able to dig, is in itself an indictment. It shows the life of someone unaccustomed to tough labour and hard work. Every disciple of Christ should be able to roll up their sleeves and do manual labour, even if their job is in an office all their life, because there are always manual jobs to do to help others. Not being able "to dig" gives an impression of a life of entitlement and what people would call today a "snowflake" - pride is the root cause, because they think they are too good for such a job – "to beg I am ashamed". Often humility is revealed as being a valuable characteristic of the disciples of Jesus. Being humble enough to ask for help, to admit failure. After all being as wise, far sighted and faithful as Joseph in the face of temptation is not as easy for some as others. Willingness to beg is essential, and pleading for forgiveness when there is no case to answer, depending utterly on grace is a realisation that yes, to beg I must, and to dig deep into the Word of God every day.

Typical

The Lord Jesus was describing someone is typical of human nature. Entitled, wasteful and proud. However, he had one redeeming feature. Resourcefulness. He took advantage of the advance warning he had been given that he was going to lose his job, and that he was still a legal representative of his Master's belongings, and he visited all of the debtors one by one, and diminished the amounts

significantly reducing the debts. This would then make those debtors now indebted and grateful to him, and they would then support and help him going forward, thus his future was secured.

Commendation

When the Master of the House found out he commended the steward – because he had done wisely. He realised he had judged a matter before he had heard it, and his steward had taken full opportunity of that. He wryly accepted that the wisdom of his servant had saved his skin.

Historical Parallel?

This parable is a parallel, - but not quite!. Israel as a nation in Jesus day – known as Judea, was the Household of God, but was being wasted away by its leaders. They had in fact been invited to give account of their behaviour by John the Baptist who urged them to repent. (Luke 3:3,7 &8.) They were given advance warning of their unjust stewardship and mismanagement of the nation. The burdens they laid upon the people could only be lifted by the Lord Jesus – Matthew 11:28-30. They were warned of pending judgement, of their sure destruction. But here the parallel ends ...Instead of using the advance notice to make alliances with surrounding nations they did the opposite, to beg they were ashamed, their pride made them reviled by the surrounding nations, who owed a debt because of their oppression of Judea, instead of alleviating the situation they just made it worse. It made their destruction sure. Despite the vanishing opportunity to repent, or to do something about the impending doom, they merely hastened it. Not commended but condemned by their Master.

Jesus' teaching to his disciples:

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 you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Jesus makes further teachings:

He DID NOT say it is alright to be dishonest. In the parable he said the the Lord commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely – or shrewdly. He did not commend the steward for being dishonest, but for making the most of the opportunity to seek a way out during the last few moments of precious opportunity.

The Lord Jesus through this parable shows the huge efforts and resourcefulness individuals can show to wriggle out of their just punishment, to avoid their eviction from their position of trust, authority and responsibility. Only he said - *for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light*. The Children of Light are those who are members of the Household, who have been enlightened and have intimate knowledge of their Father's Business. Yet in such a position, familiarity breeds contempt, and complacency sets in. It all gets taken for granted. The elect of God are warned time and again of their wastefulness. Yet they refuse to accept doom will ever befall them. They know nothing else, they don't need to dig, God has done it all for them, and don't need to beg God will always save them. They didn't bother to seek a way of escape. No need God will save us. We are the people! So the time came that even when the legions of the Roman armies were around the city, and Jerusalem was burning, the priests were still praying for

God to save them, and the various factions that had been fighting one another in the city, still held onto their conviction that God would send the Messiah to them. In vain.

Lesson for today

Jesus gave this parable for his own Children of Light to take note. He explains verse 9 And I say unto you, *Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*;[this is a term that Jesus uses to describe the world's wealth] *that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.* (KJV). On the face of it, this seems to be saying “make friends of people of money so that when you fail you can live for ever in their houses!! How do we make sense of this? The NET version is helpful. 9 *And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by how you use worldly wealth, so that when it runs out you will be welcomed into the eternal homes.*

In view of the previous parable, it makes sense with this translation. Jesus is saying as the man in the parable although being dishonest, was when under pressure wise and shrewd when it came to laying up for the future, how much more should those who are honest who when under pressure should use the wealth of this world to their advantage to lay up treasure in heaven. That is to make the most of earthly advantage such as money and riches to help others, and do good to others, to relieve the debts and burdens others are under, in order for them to be viewed in more favourable light at the judgement seat when giving account of their stewardship, so that they will be given a secure and permanent role in administrating the affairs of the Kingdom of God – the Eternal Home.

Verses 10 and 11 then bear out this understanding and interpretation of this parable:

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. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon,[worldly wealth] who will commit to your trust the true riches? Verse 12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

The Apostle Paul understood the parable clearly, and presents the teaching in another way directly and without so many layers – (the Jews who were so ready to mock were not in the audience)

2 Timothy 6: 17-19: Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

This laying up in store is what righteous wise and shrewd stewards, managers of the Household of Christ should be doing, doing good and positive works, being diligent, resourceful, wise, honest, and consistent, they that be welcomed into everlasting habitations.

Brother Terry