

OCT 7

The Dishonest Manager By Gary Harvey

Awaken to a desire to invest wisely

Scripture- Luke 16:1-13

Observation

Introduction

In this parable, Jesus offers advice on how to handle money and possessions in other parables in Luke. This parable, however, lends a new perspective on behavior with money.

Context

Jesus has been addressing large crowds of “sinners and tax collectors” as well as Pharisees up to this point (Luke 15:1-2) using parables as a teaching mode. He turns to His disciples to share this parable specifically with them. No doubt, the Pharisees and others are listening in but this is a story Jesus intends for his followers.

Luke 16:1-7

The rich man is likely a wealthy land-owner who hires employees to carry out his business. He learns that his manager who holds a highly trusted position has been wasting his possessions. The Greek term used here (*diaschorpizō* – “of property (to) waste or squander”) suggests this manager was either terribly inept or dishonest. Since he is described in verse 8a as “the dishonest manager” we assume this was his disposition from the beginning – a man of unscrupulous character.

The dishonest manager finds himself in a tough position. He has lost his job. He lacks the ability to do manual labor and he doesn't want to be left to beg on the street. He is similar to the prodigal son in the parable preceding this (Luke 15:17) who, after assessing his dire predicament, “comes to his senses.” The dishonest manager in this parable is forced to face a gut-wrenching assessment of his own plight and make some tough decisions. In verse 4, he devises a plan that will ensure a continuing relationship with friends and business partners that is designed to put him in good stead with them before word gets out that he has been shamefully fired from his job.

His boss, the wealthy land-owner, has not only fired the dishonest manager but has also demanded an accounting of how badly he has hurt his business (v2). This buys some time for the dishonest manager to act quickly to salvage his reputation. Without losing time, the dishonest manager goes to each of the debtors that owe money or

goods to the land-owner. Notice how in verse 6 the dishonest manager tells the debtor who owes a hundred measures of oil to *quickly* settle his account for half that amount. The other debtor is let off the hook for 80 percent of what he owes. These debtors are thrilled that they can settle for significantly less than what they owe and greatly appreciate what the manager has done.

Luke 16:8-9

At this point, we would expect the land-owner boss to be infuriated with this dishonest manager who has not only squandered his wealth while he was manager but, since his firing, has gouged him again in the final hours of his employment. Instead, in verse 8a, the master *commends* the dishonest manager “for his shrewdness.” What is Jesus trying to teach his disciples with this story? The parable ends here, at verse 8a, and in the next phrase Jesus begins to drive home his point.

Jesus contrasts two types of people – “sons of this world” and “sons of light.” “Sons of this world” are represented by this dishonest manager, who is wholly self-serving, and by his wealthy land-owner boss who is portrayed neither as righteous nor as unrighteous, but as a man who knows a gifted con-artist when he sees one and is willing to offer grudging admiration for his shrewdness. “Sons of light” is referring to those who have “set their affection on things above” (Colossians 3:2); in other words, followers of Jesus. Jesus points out to his disciples that the “sons of this world” exhibit a shrewdness (that is, a willingness to think through their actions thoroughly, plan accordingly and act swiftly) when dealing with “their own generation” (meaning other “sons of this world”) more so than the “sons of light” do in dealing with the world or their fellow “sons of light.”

When Jesus refers to “unrighteous wealth” in verse 9 he is referring to money and possessions that we hold and use as a part of living in this world. Note that he uses the same expression (literally in the Greek: “unrighteous mammon”) in verse 11. Money and possessions are morally neutral. They are not inherently valuable spiritually or inherently evil. Money and possessions (“unrighteous mammon”) are tools that we acknowledge are necessary in order to live in this world. Jesus is declaring here that at some point money and possessions will fail you. Therefore, use them in such a way that they have eternal significance (v 9 - “that they may receive you into the eternal dwellings”) in relation to the people you know.

Trent C. Butler relates, “By being generous with secular resources, particularly by sharing them with the poor, blind, lame and crippled, you can store up treasures in heaven. Just as the grateful debtors would welcome the manager into their homes when he needed them (v 4), so you will be welcomed to your eternal home when you die and material resources are no longer of value. Meeting you there will be those friends with whom you shared unrighteous worldly resources. They will show you to your heavenly resources.”¹

Luke 16:10-13

The parable of the 3 servants and the talents is echoed in verse 10 (see Luke 19 and Matthew 25). When it comes to worldly wealth, the amount you are entrusted with is of

little consequence. What you do with it is determined by your underlying character. Jesus makes the point that how well or how poorly you manage “worldly wealth” while you live on this earth determines what you will be entrusted with when it comes to “true riches.” True riches contrasts with “unrighteous mammon.”

What does Jesus mean by “true riches?” The phrase in verse 11 is literally rendered “who will entrust to you the true?” – meaning “true mammon” as opposed to the unrighteous mammon. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus advises us to seek His kingdom and His righteousness first so that all the “worldly mammon” will take care of itself. Paul adds in 1 Timothy 6:6, “godliness with contentment is great gain.” “True riches” is further described in 1 Tim 6:17-19 as a generous spirit that leads to acts of kindness:

“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”

Application

Wise use of your resources displays for the world just who your master truly is. Is money your master or is the Creator of all things, including money, your master? Wise use of your resources will include careful and thorough thinking and planning on your part. In other words, exercise shrewdness like the example of the shrewd, though dishonest, manager in this parable. Money and his own future comfort were the dishonest manager’s ultimate goals with no thought to eternal matters. We, as believers, can admire and emulate his ingenuity, his resourcefulness and his determination without succumbing to his level of greed. After all, we set our sights on a much greater goal than simple comfort in this world. We are after true riches.

Prayer

Ask God to open your eyes to your own habits in using money and to show you how you can thoughtfully (shrewdly) change them for greater impact in His kingdom.

NOTES

¹Butler, Trent C., Luke, Holman New Testament Commentary, 2000:Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 263.

TEACHING PLAN

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The Main Learning Idea: Students can learn that money/possessions are tools we use to enhance our walk with Christ and to bless others. We can learn *how* to use them from others.

The Main Application Idea: Students will scrutinize their own spending habits and explore new ways to positively affect God's kingdom using what is entrusted to them.

Learning Activities

Introductory/Lesson Starter: Who Said That?

Read the list of famous names to the group and as you randomly read the quotes, ask them to pair the quote to the person who said it: (more quotes are available at the website below)

Winston Churchill - "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

Donald Trump - "As long as you're going to be thinking anyway, think big."

Will Rogers - "Too many people spend money they earned, to buy things they don't want, to impress people that they don't like."

Yogi Berra - "A nickel ain't worth a dime anymore."

Ayn Rand - "Money is only a tool. It will take you wherever you wish, but it will not replace you as the driver."

John Piper - "How you use money in this life is a test run for eternity."
From: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertberger/2014/04/30/top-100-money-quotes-of-all-time/#2b59eeee4998>

Exploratory Questions:

- ASK: How did the dishonest manager demonstrate shrewdness in dealing with his problem? (verse 8)
- ASK: What motivated the dishonest manager to act shrewdly? (verses 3-4) How should our motivation be different? (verse 9) How can we model the behavior of the dishonest manager while keeping pure motives?
- ASK: One of Webster's Dictionary's definitions of *shrewd* is "marked by clever discerning awareness and hardheaded acumen." Is it appropriate for a follower of Christ be shrewd in dealing with money?

Teaching Activity: Money modifies behavior.

Take out a crisp one-dollar bill and present it to the group. Explain that if you were to hand this to anyone in the group they would likely stick it in their pocket and forget it. If, however, you were to present them with 998,000 one-dollar bills (choose any large number here) it would profoundly change their life. Ask group members to specifically describe how \$998,000 would change their life. Ask group members to specify how they could live their life so that their life choices determine how the \$998,000 is used.

Teaching Point: It is better to have an intentional life direction determine how you use money than to have money determine your life direction.

Example of money modifying behavior: Google on-line: David Lee Edwards, a 46 year -old lottery winner whose life was ruined by sudden wealth. 12 years after he won \$27 million he died alone and penniless suffering from drug-induced illnesses. [reference: https://www.theepochtimes.com/tragic-story-of-a-kentucky-man-who-won-the-lottery_2286401.html]

QUOTE: "The wealth of this world is only so much fairy gold in comparison with the true riches that belong to those who have come into possession of Christlike character."

Clovis G. Chappell, *Sermons from the Parables*

QUOTE: "There are two ways in which a Christian may view his money—'How much of my money shall I use for God?' or 'How much of God's money shall I use for myself?'"

W. Graham Scroggie, from www.sermonillustrations.com

Teaching Suggestion: Wedgwood offers twice a year, "Financial Peace University."

It is a study that provides biblical principles on money management and has many, many people get out of debt and save and spend money wisely.

More information at www.daveramsey.com or just contact Aaron Lynn at Wedgwood-aaron.lynn@wedgwoodbc.org.