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Should You Ever Befriend Dishonesty?

Luke 16:9: (NRSV) *And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.*

Sometimes you read a scripture and it makes you do a double-take, because it simply does not make sense. It then ought to become our responsibility to figure it out - to try and understand what the real message is. Such is the case with our theme text from Jesus' parable of the unjust steward. Jesus seems to say 'make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth, so you can have it easy later.' It sounds like Jesus is throwing integrity out the window along with honesty and accountability and replacing them with a situational ethics "it's all about me" approach. Could this be? Stay with us as we look into this parable, its context, its meaning, and its lessons for us.

What is the context of this particular parable?

Key elements of the context:

- Begins in **Luke 15** - there were three parables spoken before this one and one parable spoken after.
- It is a mixed audience: 1. Publicans and sinners, 2. Pharisees, 3. His disciples
- He begins by directly addressing the Pharisees, then he changes his primary audience to his disciples as he speaks this particular parable, then back to the Pharisees for the next parable.



 **Tickled Pink, Language in Context, a missionary school illustration of context and translation in a foreign country - youtube**

- "...I'm tickled pink that you've invited me here to share with you." (Translation: "It seems our guest has developed a rash and has been scratching himself so much he turned pink in places.")

Phrases that we use all the time, set in an unfamiliar context, can easily lead to misunderstanding.

Back to the parables, the main audience was the Pharisees.

1. **Parable of The Lost Sheep:** **Luke 15:3-7** - There is joy in heaven over the recovery of a sinful race. **Isaiah 53:6** **Romans 3:10:** The Pharisees would not have liked this, based on their murmurings because they saw themselves as elite, special and above everyone else. Jesus continually reminded them that they were privileged and responsible.

2. **The Lost Coin:** **Luke 15:8-10** - Restating the heavenly joy in the recovery of sinners. But again, the Pharisees saw themselves as above sinners.

3. **The Prodigal Son:** **Luke 15:11-32** - Who would these two sons be? The "elite" of Israel and the "sinners" of Israel - sinners come back and the elite complain. This makes the Pharisees mad!

The theme of the previous three was the lost has been recovered - hope for the "sinners" of the world. But now Jesus addresses his disciples directly about what to learn for others' missteps.

4. **The Unjust Steward:** **Luke 16:1-15** - A story of the unfaithful stewardship over God's people that the Pharisees were about to lose.

5. **The Rich Man & Lazarus:** **Luke 16:19-31** - Jesus re-addresses the Pharisees directly. This is a story of the actual replacement of the Pharisees and Israel, with their position of favor with Gentiles.

Who's who in the parable? The Rich Man, the Steward and the Debtors

Luke 16:1: (NASB) *Now he was also saying to the disciples, There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions.*



We have the Rich Man and the Manager/Steward. Following the context of the previous parable, it is sensible to have God pictured as the Rich Man and the Pharisees pictured as his steward.

To help us with the context, here is a scripture telling us something important about the Pharisees: Matthew 23:1-3: Jesus points out that the Pharisees weren't living the life they were telling the people to live. Their actions didn't live up to their words.

A part of the *previous parable*: Luke 15:29-32: (NASB) ²⁹But he (the eldest son, also picturing the Pharisees) answered and said to his father, Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; ³⁰but when this son of yours (the younger son, picturing the sinful Jews who had strayed away) came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him. ³¹And he said to him, Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.

This helps us to understand the role God plays in the previous parable, corresponding with the Rich Man in the parable we are studying today. These five parables are linked together. The Older Son corresponds to the Rich Man's Steward.

<u>Luke 15:11-32</u>		REPRESENTS:		<u>Luke 16:1-15</u>
Father	→	GOD	←	Rich Man
Older Son	→	PHARISEES	←	Steward
Younger Son	→	NATION OF ISRAEL	←	Debtor

Play Sports for Jesus, *Language in Context*, a missionary school illustration of context and translation in a foreign country - youtube

- "Their testimony is not worth a hill of beans!" (Translation: "Their testimony is not worth a mountain of vegetables.")
- "It's time to get on the ball for Jesus!" (Translation: "It's time to play sports for Jesus!")

Luke 16:5: (NASB) And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he began saying to the first, How much do you owe my master?

Here we have a number of debtors of the Rich Man who are coming before the Steward.

Luke 15:21-23 Amos 3:2: Why all this time on figuring out the context? Because if you *don't* know what it means, then you *won't* know what it means!!

What is "stewardship" according to the parable?

Luke 16:1: (KJV) 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.

What exactly is a "steward?" The concept of stewardship is that of the manager of a household or of household affairs, a superintendent.

To whom was Jesus talking in the parable? His disciples.

Why? He was telling them they should learn from the mistakes of this steward, who is about to get fired, because they were about to get that job!



1 Peter 4:8-11: Christian stewardship isn't for the purposes of self-glorification.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2: Anyone who is a disciple of Christ is a steward of the mysteries of God. In order to fulfill these responsibilities, a steward has to have integrity and accountability.

We should live with a large amount of integrity so our lives are reflecting what it should - Jesus. For us, the principle of stewardship can be applied in those areas where we are supposed to do something, but may have little or no interest in doing it, like learning the geography of South America in our example.

So, we have all the pieces: God is pictured by the Rich Man; the Pharisees by the Steward; and the Jewish nation by the Debtors. Jesus is telling this story to his disciples, who are going to be the new stewards of God's riches on earth.

Let's begin to unfold the parable:

Luke 16:1-3: (NASB) ¹Now he was also saying to the disciples, There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions. ²And he called him and said to him, What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager. ³The manager said to himself, What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg.



Observations:

- The Steward was NOT doing his job - he had a squandering and irresponsible attitude;
- Accountability is demanded from the Master, along with a termination notice;
- The Steward only decides to "work" because his own future survival is at stake;
- He is not strong enough to dig (till the earth), the honest work of sinners, perhaps like the prodigal son was willing to do in the previous story!
- How about begging? This happens to be the state of Lazarus in the next story!

So, what's the story?

Luke 16:4-6: (NASB) ⁴I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes. ⁵And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he began saying to the first, How much do you owe my master? ⁶And he said, A hundred measures of oil. And he said to him, Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.

- The Steward forms a plan to take care of himself once he is fired;
- He actually goes to work as a Steward (finally)!
- He cuts the first debtor's bill by 50%!

Was this a wise action or a foolish action? Proverbs 26:12: One can't have an egotistical attitude and be a steward of God's goods.

Luke 16:7: (NASB) Then he said to another, And how much do you owe? And he said, A hundred measures of wheat. He said to him, Take your bill, and write eighty.

- This was evidently a large scale operation to have had such large debts;
- This debtor was forgiven 20%. Is he cheating or helping his master?

Luke 16:8: (NRSV) And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.



The Master was pleased because he previously wasn't receiving *any* monies from the debtors. To get something vs. nothing was better. Sometimes in business, certain debts need to be written off. At least revenue was now being created.

Jesus is saying through the parable that the "child of this age" knows more about the two-way street of mercy than God's own Stewards (the Pharisees). So, the Master is commending the shrewd accounting that essentially pleases everyone and not commending the injustice of the Steward's tenure. (In other words, you are finally being merciful - that's what I wanted all along.) The Pharisees should have won the love and gratitude of their fellow Jews, but they did not.

Luke 16:9: (NRSV) *And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.*

Another translation:

Luke 16:9: (NASB) *And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.*

This is a continuation of Jesus' overall theme of these parables: The heavenly favor of God had been the responsibility of the Jews and their leaders, but it was now falling away from them into the hands of anyone who would follow Jesus. You are about to be replaced and need to have a compassionate approach.

The "Rick paraphrase" of this verse: *I tell you - my disciples - be merciful to and honest with all with whom you have dealings - don't look down on those who are not in your position. Once this world and the comparably small responsibilities we bare in it passes, you will be received into a heavenly reward for so doing.*

Mercy can be a risk sometimes, but we still need to do right by the little things (integrity) in this sinful world, because it is a small thing in comparison with eternity. Proverbs 6:6-8

The final verses of our parable:

Luke 16:10-12: (NASB) ¹⁰*He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. ¹¹Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? ¹²And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?*

The wealth of the sinful world is a little thing. If we are faithful in the little things, we can hope to be faithful in the big.

Matthew 6:24-25: Matthew 6:33

What do we learn from all this?

Jesus continually taught that God is merciful and we also should be merciful: Matthew 18:23-27
The stewardship of our lives is serious business: Titus 1:7-9 We are to be examples to all men in our service to God and our respect for all others: Matthew 5:13-16 Live according to the integrity to which you were called. We reap what we sow - no more and no less: Galatians 6:7-10

None of these things can happen without humility: 1 Peter 5:6-7: Put things in perspective from a spiritual standpoint, even though we are in an earthly world.

*So should you ever befriend dishonesty?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*