

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

January 15, 2020

The Gospel of Luke

The Parable of the Unjust Steward

Topics – Luke 16; children of this world; children of light; Pharisees; divorce

Text – Luke 16:1 - 18

Introduction

Just a reminder before we jump into the text in Luke sixteen that we are in a section of Luke's gospel where we find unique information that is mostly not dealt with at all in the other gospel accounts. The three parables that we looked at in chapter fifteen are only in Luke's gospel. The same is true with what we see in Luke sixteen. The historical context in this section of Luke, which began way back in Luke 10, is the third year of Jesus ministry. He is headed toward Jerusalem and ultimately, His crucifixion.

The two main topics dealt with in Luke 16 are the parable of the unjust steward and then the account of Lazarus and the rich man. In this lesson, we will discuss the parable of the unjust steward. It seems odd that Jesus would use a story regarding someone who is unjust or unrighteous to teach spiritual truth, but he does. Back in Luke eleven, he talked about an uncaring man who would only give bread because of the persistence of his neighbor. Later on in Luke's gospel, Jesus will tell us a story about an unjust judge. Jesus is by no means condoning any action taken by these people that are wrong, but he uses their wrong actions as a means of comparison in order to teach us what right thing we should do.

In this parable, if we are not careful, we will wrongly interpret Jesus as teaching that it is right to cheat or steal from our employers, which is not the case. Jesus is merely showing us here what human wisdom looks like within the lost world. This unjust steward was shrewd, but in a ungodly way. To conclude this section, Jesus will make an application of the parable he just taught in the directions of the Pharisees who also operated according to the principles of the lost world, though outwardly they appeared to represent the kingdom of God. The Pharisees were stewards of God's Law, yet they had been unfaithful in their stewardship.

I. The Parable (vs. 1 – 8)

The first thing that I would like to point out from this parable is that neither the rich man nor the steward are godly, or just men. They are both "children of this world (darkness)." Sometimes when we read this we see it as if it is the Lord Jesus who is commending the unjust steward for his actions, and that is not the case.

This steward (or financial manager) was responsible for handling the accounts of the rich man. The Bible says that we are stewards of the Word of God and we are to be faithful:

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

Thus steward's job was to make sure the rich man was getting paid from his debtors all that he

should be paid. We do not know exactly how the manager failed the rich man, but we do know that he was unjust and that he “wasted” the master’s goods. He was not taking good care of the master’s business. Maybe he wasn’t selling enough product, or maybe he wasn’t selling at the right price. He didn’t seem to be collecting from the customers what was owed. Expense were up and revenues were down, and the boss was not happy. This guy has got to go.

The steward determines that he is going to make some fast, albeit dishonest moves that insure a future for him. He wasn’t about to get a job where he actually had to work, and he was too proud to beg. He determines that he would go to the people that owed his boss money, and agree to get them to pay their bill at a sharp discount. He cuts one of their bills in half (v. 6), and the other he cuts by 20%. Perhaps, these debtors were willing to pay the bills right away now that they were reduced. (Like 2%10 days / net 30). This would appease his boss a little, and it would make the debtors happy as well. Maybe, they would hire him when the boss fired him.

The “lord” in verse 8 is not Jesus but the steward’s boss. The boss who operates by the principles of the world was impressed by the tactics of the unjust steward.

II. The Principle (vs. 9 – 13)

Jesus makes a strange statement in v. 9. Most interpret this statement to mean –“make friends today by using your money, so that people will be a blessing to you back when you need it:

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." (Luke 6:38)

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

Another slant on this view is that the money will be used to reach people who will receive you in Heaven. The unjust steward used earthly money to buy earthly friends. Jesus wants us to use earthly money to purchase people into Heaven by investing in the Kingdom.

Another possible meaning of this verse is that your use of the “unrighteous mammon” (or money) today will meet you someday in heaven:

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." (Revelation 14:13)

These views both fit well with the following verses. If you and I cannot be faithful with something earthly like money, how is he going to bless us with eternal riches.

In verse 13, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees belief that the accumulation of wealth is an indication of God’s blessing, and conversely, the poor are under some kind of a curse from God. Jesus states very plainly here that you cannot serve both God and money. This does not mean that money, or possessing money, is evil in itself, but it is wrong to be so consumed with money that

you are no longer able to submit to God.

III. The Practical Application (vs. 14 – 18)

The Pharisees figured out that though Jesus was warning His disciples, He was also rebuking the Pharisees. Jesus was preaching about them. The Pharisees were twisting Scripture and interpreting it whichever way it would benefit them. If you were rich, and you were taking care of the Pharisees, they would likely bend over backwards to adjust the rules in your benefit. Their interpretation of the Law was the problem, not the law itself.

This brings us to verse 18. Why did Jesus start talking about divorce. He brought it up as an illustration of how the Pharisees adjusted the Law to accommodate their own desires and to keep the rich happy. Some of these rich men were getting rid of their wives out of convenience, which was a complete distortion of the Law and the heart of God. If we had only this verse on divorce, there would be no divorce at all, but the whole counsel of God needs to be taken into account in order to get a better understanding of what God has to say in total about the subject. Here, Jesus is not teaching specifically about divorce here, but is using the teaching of divorce here parenthetically to drive the greater point home regarding these covetous Pharisees and their distortion of the Law to benefit themselves.

Chuck Swindoll on the understanding of verse 18:

Jesus closed His case against the Pharisees by citing God's ordination of marriage as a lifelong bond between a man and woman (see Gen. 2:24), an institution they had virtually erased from the Old Testament with their self-serving rules. The Mishnah preserves the oral tradition of the rabbis, two of whom, Shammai and Hillel, lived shortly before the time of Jesus. Here is a short example of their deliberations on this topic:

The House of Shammai say, "A man should divorce his wife only because he has found grounds for it in unchastity, since it is said, Because he has found in her indecency in anything (Deut. 24:1)." And the House of Hillel say, "Even if she spoiled his dish, since it is said, Because he has found in her indecency in anything. R. Aqiba says, "Even if he found someone else prettier than she, since it is said, And it shall be if she find no favor in his eyes (Deut. 24:1)."

According to the Pharisees, who favored the teaching of Hillel (naturally!), marriage could be created on a whim and dissolved just as flippantly. Make no mistake: They knew full well what they were doing. Jesus didn't need a long, drawn-out discourse to prove His point. When He merely alluded to the marriage–divorce issue and their absurd dismantling of God's design, the Pharisees wisely shut their mouths—at least for the time being. He had just proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the Pharisees subordinated the Word of God to serve their own desires.¹

¹ Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Luke (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 3) (p. 436). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.