

## **Unrighteous Mammon - A Lesson From Crooks**

Calvary B.C., Arlington, KY, September 24, 2009;

Harmony M.B.C., October 6, 2019

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### **Luke 16:1-13**

Thinking up ways to take advantage of a position of responsibility seems to come naturally to natural man. The agent in our text has apparently thought up ways to fleece his boss. The statement that somebody went to the property owner and accused the man of wasting his goods lets us know that the agent wasn't doing right by what the boss had put him in charge of. It could have been that he was using his boss's supplies to have big parties, or he could have been selling his stuff and pocketing the money. Whatever the means he was using to waste his boss's possessions, it's pretty apparent that the agent had a lot of responsibility and influence as we read about him calling his boss's debtors in and negotiating with them to pay back the debts based on a cut rate repayment. We could say this is good evidence also that he had been wheeling and dealing behind the scenes. The political scene today in the U.S. looks a lot like this guy's activities. Government has a law that is supposed to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse in the government, but it is mostly used against run-of-the-mill employees, and as is usual in organizations where the leaders run the show, the big guys rarely get whacked. They have ways of dodging human-enforced justice themselves. I think that right now, here in the U.S. we are looking at some evidence beginning to surface, that is going to expose a bunch of crooks doing more than just amassing fortunes for themselves. It looks like there's going to be evidence that a bunch of politicians have been power-playing and also trying to overthrow the will of the people of America.

This agent wasn't able to dodge justice and his boss brought him in and said what today would sound like, "you're fired; get your things in order and get out."

The hardest part of this parable to understand though about this man who was the owner of the wealth is why he commended that cheating steward. To understand it, we have to realize that it was probably because he recognized a shrewd businessman when he saw one. And although it cost him, he was still giving a hats-off to how this steward had manipulated his bad situation into some security for himself, and at the same time recovering some of the loans that were made. That commendation along with Jesus' comments about it gives us our spiritual

message. The comment that Jesus made that I want us to notice is, “**the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.**” This really is the crux of how He could preach a message based on this guy’s slick maneuvers. What he is simply saying is that people who operate like the world operates; people who live by the rules of the world because they are of this world; these people are wiser about the ways of the world than the children of God are. I’m pretty sure that He also meant that, when it came to turning a situation to a better advantage, those who lived carnal lives knew how to do it better in the natural world than apparently saved people knew how to turn their earthly situation to spiritual advantage. This meaning behind Christ’s statement gives us the central theme for our message.

May the Holy Spirit help us to look at the events in this parable the way Jesus intended, and I believe at least one message from our Lord is that even smart crooks can teach us a spiritual lesson. This comes as a relief to me, since, from what we see and hear in the news today, there are smart crooks all around us, in all walks of life and positions of leadership (I have been looking for a spiritual lesson in all this wickedness going on in high places in America, and I think Jesus gives us the key here by which we can unlock some spiritual messages that lie all around us in this moral and ethical wasteland we are in).

I. Lesson One: **(Luke 16:3) 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.** Even crooks can learn how temporary and uncertain their present position in life is:

- Let this crook’s worry over his own business future teach us a lesson about **doing some serious thinking about the fact that we are always on the edge of leaving this life.** I would like for us to realize that in a less brutal way (than this boss firing this crooked agent), but just as certain a way, the Lord is going to dismiss us from our present circumstances in this world...we will be discharged from this life.
- From the moment of birth, our stewardship here becomes shorter by the day.
  - **(James 4:14)** For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.
  - **Psalms 103:15-16** *As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. 16 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.*

II. Lesson Two: (Luke 16:4) I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. This dishonest and shady character can also teach us a lesson by how he thinks about **taking advantage of today in order to prepare for tomorrow:**

- This crook was making plans for how his future would be after this gig was finished
- We ought to **spend more time planning for eternity.** (Mat. 6:19, 21) “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth...For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”
- We ought to plan in such a way that we are **comfortable with how our eternity is going to be.**
  - Baptists have a weak spot here; it is that they sometimes use security of the believer to rest on their laurels when there is work to be done for the Lord.
  - We have things to be doing down here so that when we go before the Lord, He is able to say “well done, good and faithful servant...”
  - Paul said it like this: (2Tim. 4:7-8) “I have **fought** a good fight, I have **finished** my course, I have **kept** the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto **all them also that love his appearing.**”
- Part of the lesson from this crook is that we can be taught that **we ought to treat every human in such a way that we give them an advantage when we interact with them and possibly set them on a road to eternal advantage.** Notice how he gave the debtors a big break.
  - Concerning unbelievers: (Col. 4:5-6) **Walk** in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. **6** Let your **speech** *be* always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.
  - Concerning believers: (Philippians 2:3) *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

III. Lesson Three: (Luke 16:5-7) 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, A 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, A hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. The crook in this parable can teach us how to **influence others by practicing mercy**

- The first lesson this unjust steward leaves us (by the behavior we see in this

verse) is seen in how he condescended to mitigate the debt of those debtors...**he did it to influence them...**to generate gratitude (abuse, cruelty, carelessness never provoked any person to gratitude).

- Part of this lesson involves making people aware of the **debt to God owed by them**: Notice that these men called on the carpet **owe their debt to this guy's lord**. That was the message of this agent (“how much owest thou unto my lord”)
  - The power of a message about sin debt is that it reminds people that the **debt they owe is to the God of creation**.
- As I said, here is also a lesson about **extending mercy** (the agent cuts a deal that looks like leniency and favor): If we show leniency to people when they are under our influence (that’s the position of these debtors to this agent) it can **become a message to sinners about God’s mercy**; especially if we point them to our Lord. It is the message of mercy when humans are called on the carpet that God uses to make humans seize on His offer of grace.
  - The importance of practicing mercy when we could be merciless is shown in one of Jesus’ main complaints against the Pharisees (the super-religious of the day): (**Mat. 23:23**) **“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”**

IV. Lesson Four: (**Luke 16:8**) **And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely**: (the commendation obviously came because of how the crooked agent handled what is mentioned in **vv. 6&7**).

- When you look at what he accomplished in **vv. 6&7**, you should see:
  - He collected a debt that he was undoubtedly responsible for; even **responsibility by crooks can be commendable** (translate: we have a responsibility to God and if we act responsible we will be commended by our Lord).
  - Bosses invest time in their agents, and a return on investment will be commended (translate: the **Lord has invested time in us**; if we make use of that investment, we will be commended)
  - It is often through agents that bosses have their **connections with those they do business with**; when they fulfill that role, they will be commended by a wise boss (translate: **we are ambassadors for Christ**; if we fulfill that role we will be commended by the Lord)
  - Even though this agent worked a deal with his boss’s debtors, he ended up

gaining money for him. (Translate: This is not a lesson to us to wheel and deal in our interactions with people, but it IS a lesson that teaches us that we should do our business with other humans of this world with the idea in mind that we want to bring wealth to the storehouse of God [appropriate wealth])

IV. Lesson Five: **(Luke 16:9-12)** *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?* This crooked steward can teach us **how the practices of humans living for the world can translate into a lesson about Christians living for the other world:**

- In highlighting (in a parable) the behavior of a crook, Jesus teaches us here that **it will be our management of earthly things that witnesses for or against us in eternity**
  - Two elements of a single biblical principle explain why this is so:
    - **Rom. 14:12** So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.
    - **2Cor. 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.
- When we use the things of earth to generate spiritual products, those carnal things will witness FOR us (making friends of the unrighteous mammon) in judgment. If we use them for strictly carnal ends the opposite will be true. Christ sees earthly or material things as “least” things; **but how they are handled is a signature of how big things are handled**

V. Conclusion: **“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”** But, you can make mammon serve the living God!