

**THE PARABLE OF
THE UNJUST STEWARD**



**PASSIONATELY
INVESTING IN
ETERNITY**

(LUKE 16:1-13)

Introduction

This parable is a very interesting parable because the LORD uses a bad example in order to illustrate one main truth to His disciples that He wanted them to learn. The LORD does not commend the wickedness that was illustrated but actually uses it to rebuke challenge and encourage His followers to be passionately investing in eternity.

The unjust steward was passionate about setting up his life in this world and was determined to do anything to secure his future. The Lord created this parable to contrast the active ‘wisdom’ of the children of the world with the complacent lethargy of the children of light. Ultimately the parable is a direct challenge as to where our hearts are at, as disciples, because that is what we are passionate about and that is where we are ‘investing’ our money. We spend money on what we love and focus on.

This parable is not designed to promote pragmatism which justifies any means to achieve the end result. The ‘means’ that the parable focuses on is money to achieve the desired end which is to invest it in the work of God to impact lives for all eternity: specifically, for the salvation of souls. This parable is not condoning wicked practices and unjust gains in the name of using it for Christ, but rather it is to show how the lost give there all in living for what they believe and what’s important to them, so how much more should the children of God live in such a way where they believe they are sojourners in this life simply passing through, for their citizenship is heaven.

The Lord states the point of the parable in verse 9 about Passionately Investing In Eternity, then concludes the parable in verse 13 with an authoritative ‘matter of fact’ statement concerning the single-focused, whole-heart, undivided object of our devotion and service, which we will consider toward the close of the study.

A. The People Confronted

Luke 16:1 And he said also unto his disciples...

As Jesus was walking on His way to Jerusalem (Luke 17:1) there was a great multitude walking with Him (Luke 14:25). In previous chapters the Lord had already addressed the multitude collectively but here now directs His focus on His disciples. Although He is speaking directly to His disciples, keep in mind there were still many round about the could clearly hear what the Lord was saying. Amongst those many were some covetous Pharisees (Luke 16:14) that didn't like what the Lord was saying.

B. The Parable

1. *The Scenario*

Luke 16:1 ...There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

The steward is not the only character in the parable but he is the main character that holds all relevance to the purpose of the parable. A steward is the hired servant of a master that manages and invests master's goods and money. The koine Greek word here for steward is *oikonomos* (οἰκονόμος) which is a compilation of two words: *oikos* (οἶκος) meaning 'house/household'; and *nomos* (νόμος) meaning 'law'. In essence a steward was someone who had the 'law of the house'. It was common for rich folk to hire stewards to manage their households and agricultural production and distribution.

There was an accuser, that is left anonymous, which brings an accusation [*diaballo* (διαβάλλω)] against the steward suggesting that he had carelessly scattered and wasted the master's possessions/goods. The steward was entrusted to faithfully manage the master's possessions, not waste it.

2. *The Summons*

Luke 16:2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

Due to the accusation, the master of the house called for the steward and gave him his ‘final notice’ and demanded a ‘final report’ regarding his stewardship. A ‘steward’ is the position and the ‘stewardship’ was the practice. The koine Greek word for ‘stewardship’ is *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία) which is where we get our English word ‘economy’ from. This does not only refer to the careful management of available resources, but also the state/condition in terms of consumption and production of goods and services and the supply of income. The master here was facing an ‘economic crisis’ because of the unfaithfulness of the steward, hence the termination of his position with notice.

3. *The Situation*

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.

The steward does not present any defence to clear the accusation affirming the accusation to be true. He is now faced with the situation of having lost his job which in turn mean he will lose his lively hood, so he begins to reason within himself. This carries the idea of being wise in his own conceit. He refused the option to labour physically, but knew if he didn’t do something, he would be poor. Pro 26:16 The sluggard *is* wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.

4. *The Scheme*

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.

He made up his mind that he was going to make sure that he was set up and guaranteed to have a house that he will be welcomed into so he’s

not out on the street homeless and begging. So, he devised a cunning scheme that was going to help him in being established in this life and not left stranded, even though he brought it upon himself.

5. *The Subtilty*

Luke 16:5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors *unto him*, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

Luke 16:6 And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

Luke 16:7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

He decided he was going to get in contact with all his Master's contacts and make a deal with them all that will be completely in his favour but make it appear as if he is making a deal to work in their favour enough that they would 'buy it'. The idea behind the verb 'called' is that it was an ongoing thing. Although the parable only mentions two debtors, there is no doubt that the 'rich man' had more than two contacts. Nevertheless, the two examples the Lord included were sufficient to expose the unjust steward's scheme. In essence, the offer was pay now and you don't have to pay full price; and he pocketed the money while gaining the favour of his master's debtors, causing them to believe that he had helped them out when he was only really helping himself out.

The first debtor is estimated to have owed the equivalent of 3 years wages. So, from the first debtor, he embezzled enough to set himself up for approximately 1 and a half years.

The second debtor is estimated to have owed the equivalent of 8-10 years of wages. Therefore, from the second debtor, he embezzled enough money to set himself up for about 9 or so years...and so on with the other debtors.

The idea was to embezzle the money and not only earn the favour of the debtors, making them think that he was helping them out, but not

he has also set up the debtors to guarantee help, lest he expose their dishonesty and dishonour them and their business publicly.

6. *The Sequel*

Luke 16:8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

The illustration has an unexpected ending concerning the response of the master toward the unjust steward. The master of the house applauded the unjust steward for his wittiness concerning his scheme. The word ‘wisely’ here is not implying the wisdom that comes from God but rather wisdom that is earthly, sensual, and devilish (James 3:15). It is clear that the lord here is not the Lord Jesus Christ because never will you find throughout the bible, Jesus ever commending the very wickedness that He suffered and died for. He does, however, take this bad example to bring an inditement upon His disciples.

Before stating the main point of the parable, Jesus closes the illustrative story by stating that “...the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. (Luke 16:8b).” The “children of this world” is referring to those that do not belong to God. Luke 9:41 refers to them as a “faithless and perverse generation.” They don’t belong to God but to the devil (2 Corinthians 4:4; John 8:44). Yet God is drawing the fact that the lost are ‘wiser’ in terms of their passionate investment and pursuits; They plan and pursue with passion and energy what they purpose, and they invest their money in the things of this world which is what they are living for and chasing after to set up their future...but the children of light do not ‘invest’ in their eternal destination that they say they will surely go to and abide. The children of light claim to be going to heaven, but are using their money and energy to store up treasures unto themselves here on this earth and not investing in their eternal future. The unjust steward purposed in his heart that he was going to invest in his future to set up his life here on earth, and the children of light pattern themselves after the philosophy of this world

rather than the philosophy of God’s Word concerning His children’s investments and pursuits.

One commentator said:

“If we pursued the Kingdom of God with the same vigor and zeal that the children of this world pursue profits and pleasure, we would live in an entirely different world.”

C. The Point

Luke 16:9 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.

The “mammon of unrighteousness” referring to temporal riches and wealth. It is referred to as “the “mammon of unrighteousness” because money is often made in an unrighteous way and used for corruption and greediness. In 1 Peter 5:2 and elsewhere in the Scriptures, money is referred to as filthy lucre.

The word “fail” is not referring to a ‘failing to accomplish’. The Greek word *ekleipo* (ἐκλείπω) means to ‘cease’ or ‘die’. This means, “when **ye** fail” is referring to the time you die or the time your opportunity to be a steward will cease.

Therefore, the verse is teaching us to use our money now while we have opportunity to invest it in making friends that one day, when we die and enter heavens gates, we will have friends there that will welcome us into heaven. The way to use our money to make these kinds of friends is to be investing in the kingdom of God now. It’s to be putting our money into the work of God. Practically, that is putting our money toward fulfilling the Great Commission. Supporting missions, and pastors, and preachers locally, and to be going out even to the regions beyond where perhaps you personally may not be able to go, or God has not called you to go. Although God has not called you to preach, and teach, go to the uttermost parts of the world because He wants you

to stay and support and strengthen and labour together with your home church, yet your money can be put towards those that are called to go, and are called to preach, and to teach; and one day when you enter heavens gates, you will find ‘friends’ their to welcome you in. Friends that without you perhaps ever meeting them on earth, they have entered into eternal life because you used your money to support the work and workers of God to reach others with the gospel.

The main point of the parable is to Passionately Invest In Eternity.

Luke 12:32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Luke 12:33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. Luke 12:34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Luke 18:22 Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

Luke 12:18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. Luke 12:19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry. Luke 12:20 But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? Luke 12:21 So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, **and is not rich toward God.**

1Timothy 6:17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; 1Timothy 6:18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, **ready to distribute, willing to communicate;[be liberal]** 1Timothy 6:19 Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, **that they may lay hold on eternal life.**

Philippians 4:15 Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. Philippians 4:16 For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Philippians 4:17 **Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.**

Acts 20:33-35 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel...It is more blessed to give than to receive.

D. The Principle

Luke 16:10 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.

To be a faithful steward of your money is the basic/simple beginnings. The principle exercised in being faithful in handling little is the same principle exercised in handling much. To be an unjust steward has a lot to do with your philosophy. The philosophy of a steward will always be manifest in the way they handle their money which will determine whether they are trustworthy or treacherous. Some think if they had more money, they'd give more money; but whether you have little or much does not determine your faithfulness with what you do with the little or much that you have. **(Mark 12:42-44)**

E. The Pointed Considerations

1. The Serious Reality

Luke 16:11 If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*?

The word "true" in the Greek word *aleithinos* (ἀληθινός) implies a contrast between one that is greater than the other. Imperfect vs Perfect (John 1:17). Not so much a contrast between the false and the true in this context, but rather it is referring to 'The Means vs The End'. Temporal money is a means to an end and not an end itself.

The idea in this verse is that if you have not faithfully invested your temporal money/riches wisely, who will “commit to your trust” [to credit] the true riches [referring to spiritual and eternal riches] in contrast to temporal mammon/money?

The Rich Fool

Luke 12:20 But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? Luke 12:21 *So is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, **and is not rich toward God.**

Church of the Laodiceans

Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: Revelation 3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

The Church in Smyrna

Revelation 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, **(but thou art rich)** and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan. Revelation 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and **I will give thee a crown of life.**

2. The Sober Realisation

Luke 16:12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

Normally we would say something like, “Learn to be responsible with your own things that you would be found trustworthy to take care of other people’s things.” However, the Lord says it’s the other way

around. Simply for this reason...What we have, is not ours; it all belongs to God. We are simply stewards of someone else's possessions.

Ecclesiastes 5:18 Behold *that* which I have seen: *it is* good and comely *for one* to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for *it is* his portion. Ecclesiastes 5:19 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; *this is* the gift of God.

1 Chronicles 29:12-16

F. The Proposed Conclusion

Luke 16:13 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.

A servant in bible times was purchased and owned by only one master. He/she was only obligated and able to be subject to the one that bought them. We would equate a household servant in bible times to what we would call in our age maids, butlers, housekeepers...

The Lord Jesus proposes undebatable conclusion. You **cannot** serve two masters. You **cannot** serve God and mammon. You are either Serving Money or Serving God, but you are not able to do both. You are either a slave to money or a servant of God.

James 4:13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: James 4:14 Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. **For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.** James 4:15 For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

If you're chasing after your own riches on earth, you are forsaking your riches in heaven. Why invest in this temporal life which is like a vapour that appears for a little time then vanisheth away when you cannot lay up treasures in heaven.

Matthew 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: Matthew 6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

This is not talking about getting rid of everything you have and live on the streets by faith but rather where is your heart! It's not forbidding a home, and resting, and certain privileges that God has given to us to enjoy...but if that's what your life is about, you are laying up treasures in a place that yields no reward nor interest. It's vain and wasted.

G. The Personal Challenge

1. Have I been passionately investing in eternity?
2. Have I been a faithful steward with what I have entrusted?
3. Where is my heart?
4. Does God truly have my heart?
5. What am I passionate about?
6. Who am I serving?

Memory Verse (Luke 16:9)

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.