

Exegetical Notes - Luke 16:1-15

“Dishonesty Commended”

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Luke 16:1-15

Verse 1-2

Jesus told his disciples, “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’”

- This message was only for Jesus’ disciples. It was not a lesson given to the public or to a general crowd.
- Jesus told a story about a rich man who had a chief financial officer (CFO) who was cheating the corporation. The owner called the CFO into his office and asked for an accounting of his activity, for he was removing him from that position.
- Note that there was no question that the CFO was guilty of abusing his position. He was dishonest and was cheating the owner of the corporation.

Verse 3-4

“The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig and I’m ashamed to beg -- I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’”

- Realizing that he had been found out and was going to lose his job, the CFO came up with a plan that would secure him a place in the future.

Verse 5-7

“So he called in each one of his masters debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make

it four hundred.’ Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’”

- The CFO’s plan was to endear himself to his master’s creditors by altering their bills to lower amounts. Though he was continuing to cheat the owner of the corporation, he was making friends of others so that they would give him favor after he was fired.

Verse 8

“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of light.”

- Here is the twist in Jesus’ story. One would expect Jesus to use the parable to teach against dishonest business practices. However, the owner in the story commends the dishonest practices of the CFO because they are shrewd. The CFO used the resources presently in his hand to insure his best interest in the future. Though he does this in a dishonest way, he is preparing for the future none-the-less.

Verse 9

“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”

- Jesus’ point is that we should use what God has given us here on earth in such a way as to influence people for God. In so pleasing God, we will earn rewards in heaven. We should not use what we have been given dishonestly, but we should use it wisely for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Verse 10-12

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?”

- We have all been entrusted with some measure of wealth from God. If we deal honestly with people, we will deal honestly with people whether that entrusted to us is great or small.

- If we do not deal honestly with the gifts God has given us here on earth, God will not entrust “true riches” to us in heaven. Our faithfulness to God here on earth is noticed in heaven.

Verse 13

“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

- It is impossible to be driven by the desire to have money and things and faithfully serve God. If money and possessions are what drives us, we will not be satisfied with Jesus. And if we serve Jesus, we will use our wealth in a way that pleases him.

Verse 14-15

“The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, ‘You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.’”

- The Pharisees saw wealth as proof that God loved and esteemed them because he had blessed them with wealth. Jesus said that they claimed that wealth showed that God’s favor was upon them.
- Jesus said that this self-justification was inappropriate. God valued other things more highly than wealth.
- God looks on the heart to determine our worth, not on outward expressions.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Dishonesty Commended*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)