

The Parable About How To Have Friends Beyond The Grave (often unhelpfully known as the Parable of the Unjust Steward) - Luke 16:1-15.



This is probably one of Jesus' most challenging parables and he told it with his disciples firmly in mind – verse 1. It is challenging because it is entirely to do with our attitude towards money, and the way we use it in this life. And how we use it in this life, Jesus says, has eternal consequences.

I have never been one for having lots of Bible verses scattered around the house, but I do have one which is magnetically fixed to our fridge door. It says this: - "The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be... and end up being." (Mt. 6:21 The Message).

I like this verse. In context it reminds me **not** to store up treasure for myself on earth but to store up treasure for myself in heaven. But how do I/we do that? The parable in Lk. 16:1-14 gives us some clues.

The rich man in the parable, who incidentally is never referred to as God, (God would never compliment a crook) had an estate manager who was playing fast and loose with his master's possessions. He wasted and squandered what didn't belong to him. This is an important point and crops up again later in the parable.

Knowing that he had been found out and was going to be fired, the manager did something to ensure he had friends who would provide for him and welcome him into their houses after he had lost his job, lost his income and lost the tied accommodation that was part of his employment package.

He had been a pen-pusher all his life, had smooth hands and was too proud to go begging on the streets, so he hit on a cunning plan. He committed fraud. He was corrupt and abused his position of trust and power in the hope of receiving personal favours from his master's debtors. This manager was quite happy to falsify his master's accounts and the debtors were content to go along with this deceit. Very murky indeed.

In the UK today, fraud, much of it online, accounts for nearly 40% of all crime. It involves a person dishonestly and deliberately deceiving a victim for personal gain. I would be very surprised if you have not had 'scam' phone-calls or online approaches.



There are online shopping and auction scams, lottery scams, impersonation scams, investment scams, courier scams, romance scams, inheritance fraud, identity fraud, insurance fraud, banking and payment card frauds etc. This type of crime has increased even more since the Covid-19 epidemic with over 60's and under 21's being the most vulnerable groups age-wise.

The Crime Survey for England & Wales (CSEW) estimated that there were 3.9 million fraud offences against adults in England & Wales in the year ending June 2019 but that the true number is likely to be 5 times higher.

But back to the parable for the real shock. The shock is not so much that the rich man/master commends the dishonest manager for his shrewdness, his prudence, his astuteness, his business acumen, his worldly wisdom – sometimes in business and financial transactions there can be a certain camaraderie between deceivers and deceived (honour among thieves). No, the real shock is in Jesus' application of this story to you and me when he says, in effect: -

'Understand this my disciples, the fraudsters of this world, working in the dark, are much more savvy in their use of money than you are as people of the light. Think carefully about how you are using your money and use it in such a way that you will have plenty of friends to welcome you into heaven after you have died.' (Verses 8 & 9)

Wow! That's some statement! But this, I believe, is the main point of the parable, though some commentators go into great detail about 'how the master pays the price of the manager's salvation' and how the master and manager 'become the heroes of the community' and how the 'entire scheme is built on the manager's complementary evaluation of the nature of the master'. I think all of this entirely misses the main point of the parable.

But how are we to use our money in order to make friends who will welcome us into heaven after we die?

Well, maybe through our giving money for food and Bibles to the people of Ukraine, some of them will become Christians and, as a result, secure a place in heaven as a direct result of the money we gave.

Maybe through the money we gave to Jews for Jesus or Christian Ministry among Jewish people, a Jew somewhere will have the veil removed from their eyes and receive their Messiah. If they die before us, they too will be there to welcome us into heaven.

And suppose we gave some money to the Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI) and they were able to rescue someone from drowning who later gave thanks to God for their rescue and became a Christian. They too will recognise that their salvation through Christ was in part made possible because of the way we used our cash on earth.

And suppose, after our pilgrimage on this earth has ended, we had left a legacy to Barnabas Aid or Open Doors or our local Church or whatever our favourite Christian charity is.

Instead of **us** being welcomed by friends in heaven, **we** will be doing the welcoming of those who became Christians through the ongoing ministry of those organisations we supported. And because the impact of legacies can live on for generations, there may be a steady stream of folks over a long period of time whom we can welcome into heaven when it's their turn to arrive!

So Jesus is telling us that there is a direct link between our use of money and the arrangements we make when we are alive, and the number of friends we will have beyond the grave.

Personally, I am not at all interested in how many 'friends' I have on social media (I'm not even on it!) but I am, hopefully, building up the number of friends I will have after I die. It must be a terrible thing to be friendless beyond the grave.

Jesus then goes on to apply this parable further and teaches us some more amazing things about money (see verses 10-12). It was, after all, his favourite subject!

Interpreting parables is about comparing and contrasting, and Jesus does this three times in these three verses. He talks about: -

1. Being trusted (or being dishonest) with 'very little' versus being trusted (or being dishonest) with 'very much'.
2. Having 'worldly wealth' versus having 'true riches'.
3. Having 'someone else's property' versus having 'property of your own'.

Very little versus very much

In this life, no matter how much money we have, it is very little compared with what we will have in the new heaven and earth. Then, we will have very much. If we are not trustworthy/honest with the little we have here, we will not be trustworthy/honest with the 'very much' of the future. Our attitude to, and use of money now, have repercussions for our future inheritance.

Worldly wealth versus true riches

'Worldly wealth' (NIV vs. 9 & 11) sounds quite innocuous, but other translations get nearer to the truth about money. We would all, I imagine, agree with the verse which reminds us that it is **the love of money** which is the root of all evils (1 Tim. 6:10).

But another Biblical truth, that Jesus warns us about, is that there is something intrinsically dangerous about money in and of itself. Hence the RSV describes it in this parable as 'unrighteous mammon' (the literal translation) and, in other parts of the Bible, money is called 'filthy lucre' (e.g. in the Authorised Version of 1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7,11; 1 Peter 5:2).



There is something seductive and addictive about money; it is almost like a drug. And, what is even more dangerous, it easily becomes a rival god.

It is still possible, however, to use the tainted money of this world for good and eternal ends. But true riches are for the future when we are part of the new heaven and earth.

If we handle money badly whilst here on earth, it shows we are unfit to use true heavenly riches.

Having someone else's property versus having our own property

Another amazing truth this parable reveals, is that everything we have in this world is someone else's property ~ God's. What we think we own is not ours! Yes, my wife and I are 'tenants in common' of the house we 'own'. But truly, it is God's property, not ours.

1 Chronicles chapter 29 is an impressive account of what happened when there was a Gift Day for the new Temple in Jerusalem. The King, David, the Commanders, the Leaders, the People, gave willingly and abundantly.

And David said, "I now give **my personal** treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God..." however, in his prayer to God he acknowledges that, "Everything in heaven and earth is **yours**; wealth and honour come from **you**; Everything comes from **you**, and we have given **you** only what comes from **your** hand."

In this world, we are stewards of what God has given us; only in the future heaven and earth will we truly have property and resources of our own.

All this teaching is for those of us who are Christians, but how are we reacting to it? I find it very challenging.

There was, however, another group of people, on the edge of things, who were listening to Jesus ~ the Pharisees.

The Pharisees believed, as many today seem to, that it **is** possible to love/serve money **and** to love/serve God. But Jesus said the two are mutually exclusive; either we will love one and hate the other or we will hate the one and love the other. It is not possible to serve both God and money (verse 13.)

The Pharisees 'loved money'. And for anyone who 'loves money' this parable may well be too much to accept. In fact, they 'turned their noses up' at Jesus ('exemukterizon' – from 'mukter' = the nose).

They scoffed, but true disciples continue to use and invest money wisely and look forward to the reception they will receive from the friends waiting to welcome them into heaven.

George Irving – July 2022