

THE BOOK OF LUKE
STUDY TWENTY THREE (LUKE 16:1-13)
PARABLES FOR THE DISCIPLES
"THE UNJUST STEWARD"
JUNE 22, 2008

MEMORY VERSE

Luke 16:13, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
You cannot serve God and money."

INTRODUCTION

Of all the teachings of Jesus, this parable concerning the unjust steward is considered to be one of the most difficult passages to understand. In the first eight verses of chapter 16, Jesus tells the story of an unjust steward who is caught embezzling the possessions of his master. The manager realizes the severe predicament he is in and devises a plan to reduce the amount owed by some of his master's debtors in order to potentially gain their favor in the future. The controversy concerning this passage centers on verse eight, where the master commends the manager for his shrewdness in handling the situation. In interpreting the meaning of verse eight, most scholars arrive at two basic conclusions. (1) The manager was dishonest in reducing the bills of the master, however, he was thinking ahead and Jesus commends him for his forethought. (2) The manager may have been dishonest earlier, but he determined to cut out his large personal commission in order to secure goodwill for later. In this regard, Jesus commends him for his foresight in planning for his future care. No matter what interpretation is applied, Jesus uses this parable to emphasize important principles concerning our attitudes in handling the resources God provides us in this life. Throughout his Gospel, Luke highlights the role that money and possessions play in our lives. This parable, in particular, argues that the use of resources given to us by God is a litmus test of spiritual stewardship. We are to be wise in our financial dealings, not to earn heaven, but so that heaven will be a welcome experience for those we help. The use of our resources to help those in need, or to point people to Jesus, is an earthly investment that will reap eternal benefits. The manner in which we handle our resources and means is also a reflection of our integrity and character. God calls us to be honest even in the small details of life. If we are not trustworthy with our money here on earth, how will we be fit to handle the riches of God's kingdom in the future. In this teaching, Jesus also makes it very clear that we cannot serve two masters. Do we serve God or our resources and the pursuit of them? For many this is a fundamental question in life. The pursuit of wealth has the power to take God's place in our lives. Jesus says no man can serve both God and money and the decision concerning who will follow is one of the most critical and impacting choices we make in this life.

LEARNING FORM GOD'S WORD

1. In what crisis does the manager find himself? What plan does he devise to deal with his dilemma? Why does the name "shrewd manager" fit this man Jesus is describing?
2. In light of the manager's deceit, why does the master commend him in verse eight? Based on Luke 16:8-9, what was the primary point Jesus was attempting to convey to the disciples through this parable?
3. What principles of money management can you draw from Luke 16:8-12? How do these verses help clarify the point Jesus makes concerning worldly wealth versus eternal wealth?
4. What does Jesus mean when he states the worldly are wiser in their material pursuits than God's people are in their spiritual pursuits? How does the way we manage our affairs on earth potentially impact how we will manage the riches of God's kingdom?
5. Jesus says in Luke 16:13, "You cannot serve God and money." What is the problem in trying to serve two masters?

OUR WALK WITH GOD

1. Why do most people struggle with the pursuit of wealth and the love of worldly possessions? How do you measure up in this area of your life? What are some steps you need to take today in order to begin investing your possessions with an eternal perspective?

2. Our integrity often meets its match in money matters. Why is it so important for us to be faithful with everything we have in this world? What are some areas of your life where you have not been faithful and honest in your dealings before the Lord and others? What steps can you take today to address these areas of weakness and vulnerability?

3. Money has the power to take God's place in your life. Answer the following questions honestly and determine whether you have become a slave to money, or may be on the road to falling into this trap.
 - a. Do you think and worry about money frequently?
 - b. Do you give up doing what you should do or would like to do in order to make more money?
 - c. Do you spend a great deal of your time caring for your possessions?
 - d. Is it hard for you to give money away?
 - e. Are you under a huge debt?

If you struggle in answering all or some of these questions above, you most likely have allowed money to take an inappropriate place in your life. Jesus says this is a problem and you must deal with it immediately. Ask the Lord to reveal to you how you might begin to address this problem in your life. Share this with your small group and ask them to hold you accountable in dealing with this issue.

GOING DEEPER

What do the following passages reveal to you regarding God's perspective on how we handle money and possessions in this life (Ecclesiastes 5:10-13; Matthew 6:20, 19:21; Mark 8:36; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15; Philippians 3:8; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Hebrews 13:5)?