



Good News for all people.

The Gospel of Luke

Week 15 **LEADER** Discussion Questions

Week of 1/15/23

Text: Luke 16:1-15

Icebreaker: How would you describe our culture's attitude toward wealth and possessions today? Do you see Christians as having the same attitude or is it somehow different?

1. Try to summarize the overall plot of this (challenging) parable from verses 1-8. From verse 8, what exactly is the dishonest manager, or steward, being commended for by the master?

This is a famously difficult parable to understand! One of the most essential points is that the steward is only being commended for his "shrewdness" and not for the host of unjust actions he was a part of. Jesus's point is what's often referred to as a "how-much-more" comparison: "If this guy who's a scoundrel can do this thing that's commendable, *how much more* should you—my disciples—do this same commendable thing." The "shrewdness" can be broken in to at least a couple different components.

First, the steward was shrewd in that he realized the gravity of the situation he was in. All his material resources are about to vanish because he is being fired. The Christian, then, should also realize the gravity of our own situation, including that all our material resources are soon going to vanish as well. That reality check is what drives our actions.

Second, the steward was shrewd because his actions prioritized relationships over money and possessions. Money was merely an instrument to form and reinforce relationships. Some use relationships to find a financial advantage, but the steward wisely used his (quickly fading) financial advantage to build relationships that would save him once his money was gone. (The culture of this day had a deep commitment to reciprocity so that a favor done for someone could be expected to yield an equal favor in return). Christians are wise, or shrewd, when we too realize that money and possessions are quickly fading away and in-turn use those resources to build eternal relationships that outlast our money. This lesson is contained most clearly in verse 9.

2. Verses 8-9 are the bottom line of the parable. The "shrewdness" of the manager is being commended, where shrewdness is explained as the actions of verse 9. What attitude does Jesus seem to have toward wealth and possessions based on what's said in verse 9?

First, wealth is described as "unrighteous." Commentator John Nolland explains that "wealth is part of the present world system and as such has seductive qualities that Luke is keen to warn against." Second, as "part of the present world system," it *will* fail. It's only temporary. Again, Nolland writes "The point is that 'you can't take it with you.'"

Application: Do you see a contrast between what Jesus says about wealth in these verses and the attitude of our culture toward it? Explain what you think.

This is very similar to the icebreaker question above. The point is not to bash “the culture,” but to recognize how distinct Jesus’s teaching on money and possessions is to the conventional wisdom we often hear.

3. Verses 10-13 present the relationship between the riches of this life with those of the life to come. What can we learn from these verses about the differences between these two types of riches?

First, in comparison, the riches of this life are “very little” when weighed against the riches of the life to come. Second, the riches of this life are “unrighteous,” while those of eternity are “true.” Third, and maybe most surprising to consider, the riches of this life are “another’s,” while the riches of the life to come are “your own.” In other words, the wealth and possessions of this life are entrusted to us in a stewardship not unlike what the unjust manager was entrusted with in the previous verses. Our stewardship of God’s resources in this life in some way determines what we will “own” in the life to come.

Application: The word *faithful* is repeated in these verses. From this passage and others that you can think of in Scripture, what does it mean for us to have an attitude toward our money that is faithful?

One answer to include here is the attitude of a steward. How differently would I handle my wealth and possessions if I stopped thinking of them as “mine?”

4. Jesus says in verse 13 that, “No servant can serve two masters...You cannot serve God and money.” Do you agree with Jesus? 😊 Why?

Jesus said it. I believe it. That settles it...well, this is an invitation to think more deeply about the claim Jesus is making here. Why can’t a person have it both ways? Why can’t I serve God AND money? Is there something unique about money and possessions that makes service to them incompatible with serving God?

Application: What do you think it means for us to “serve” money as a “master?” Think of examples from either your own experience or those close to you where money has been a kind of master.

5. Verses 14-15 underscore the difference between the world’s attitude toward money and the way God desires money to be used. What is “exalted among men [but] is an abomination in the sight of God” when it comes to wealth and possessions?

Having a lot of money and possessions can easily become signs of importance and validation of living life the right way—or even of God’s favor (ironically, given the actual teaching of this passage and others). Flaunted wealth is often celebrated, is it not?

Application: Do you think Jesus’s teaching on wealth is still subject to ridicule today? Why or why not?

This is not intended to be a slam-dunk “YES!” An argument could perhaps be made that Jesus’s teaching is not entirely unique. Plenty of other world religions and spiritual leaders have also spoken about the dangers of wealth. A lot of people—Christians or not—may agree that money is temporary and should be handled with care. Some secular political systems seek to equalize wealth, which proponents argue as being compatible with Jesus’s teaching. Maybe the biggest distinctive, though, is the Christian motivation of serving the one true God by the proper use of money and possessions (v. 13). That’s where the potential for ridicule is strongest. Also, we might include the simple observation that it is easy and even popular to speak about money as though it’s not that important, but to live in a way that reveals a God-like dependence upon it. It’s one thing to pay lip service to Jesus’s teaching; it’s another thing to live it out daily.