

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse - Sunday February 25th 2007 Luke 16:1-9 - The Parable of The Unjust Steward

What on earth is Jesus doing in this parable, telling us to use money to win friends, and commending a dishonest steward? Aren't Jesus' followers supposed to be paragons of morality?

Here are three reasons why Jesus tells this story:

- The estate manager saw the issues clearly.

He sees things as they really are – life, death, heaven, hell, sin, judgement, Most of the time, we are so busy doing life – families, holidays, decorating our homes - that we are oblivious to eternal issues. Until, that is, something happens, something is discovered, someone finds us out and we see ourselves as we really are. Just as Alfred Nobel did when his obituary was placed in the newspaper in error when it was his brother who had died. It said 'Le marchand de la mort est mort' – 'The merchant of death is dead.' He was devastated. What we do at this point is absolutely critical! Do you try to defend yourself, play the victim, or blame others, just as Adam blamed his wife when he sinned? When the owner of the estate confronts the manager with the squandering of his wealth, the latter knows he is guilty, he is silent. This is the wisdom that Jesus commends. So it is that everyone sits in a valley of decision, because there is a reckoning to come, there is judgement. Everyone will be found wanting, cheating, squandering, for all have sinned. To think otherwise is foolishness. The business of every day is to prepare for that day. Many people do that by buying all sorts of insurance policies, but neglecting the one policy that that is worth anything, our eternal destiny. This man faced himself while he still had time.

- Jesus commends him because he throws himself on the mercy of God.

He has a window of opportunity between realising he will lose his job and actually it coming to pass when he will have to show the accounts to the owner. He knows something about his master and decides to take a gamble on his master's character. When the sin is found out he is fired but he is not jailed (contrary to Jewish Law at the time), he is not even scolded. His master is unusually kind in this respect and just wants the books. In the meantime, the manager has taken a gamble on the master's character and has cut the debts of the creditors to put himself in their favour. They are amazed both at his generosity and at his authority to be allowed to do this. When the master hears about it he should condemn him but this would appear miserly and niggardly. There is mercy in his heart and generosity. Jesus commends this as God loves to be merciful. When confronted with our sins we should not plead innocence but should plead for mercy.

- Jesus commends him because he shrewdly invested everything for the future.

If he could win enough favour he knew he would be safe. So if you want to be wise invest everything in that future world. Not that we are justified by works, we are justified by faith so put your faith in the resurrection of Christ. But one day we too will have to give an account, so in the same way that Nobel was able to read his obituary before he died and subsequently resolved to use his millions to reward accomplishments that benefited humanity – the Nobel Prizes - let us look carefully at our own obituary not as written by biased men, but as Heaven might write it, and then spend the rest of our lives editing it until it is what we want it to be.