

The Dishonest Manager

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost) is Luke 16:1-15. In this text the discourse continues, but the audience shifts from the tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and scribes of Luke 15 to Jesus' disciples.

This parable can be complex and confusing. Interpreters differ over this difficult parable, unlike the clearer symbolism of parables in ch 15. The sayings of Jesus in Luke 12, where Jesus told another parable about a steward, but a faithful one (12:41-48), should be ringing in the hearers' ears.

The steward most likely is a salaried estate agent. The debtors in the parable probably rent property from the lord to grow crops, and the debt is a predetermined portion of the harvest, whether it be olive oil or wheat. When the report about wastefulness comes, the lord tells the steward he is fired, but he does *not* throw him into jail or punish him in any way. This would have been the lord's right, but he is a merciful man. *It is this mercy that the steward banks on in deciding upon the solution to his problem.* When one chooses to focus on the mercy of the lord, the question of the dishonesty of the steward in squandering the lord's possessions becomes a moot point. (CC –Just)

In (16:9), Jesus commands his disciples to “make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon” (16:9a). The Aramaic, “mammon” refers to money or possessions. Jesus is exhorting the disciples to follow in the footsteps of the prudent steward, who used mammon generously to make friends for himself. By helping those in need, who in the future will show their gratitude when they welcome their benefactors into heaven (“eternal dwellings”). In this way worldly wealth may be wisely used to gain eternal benefit.

In the second saying (16:10–12), “unrighteous mammon” is compared with “the true thing” (16:11). The issue is faithfulness. The section begins by describing both “faithfulness” and unfaithfulness (“unrighteousness”) in two general principles that are paralleled: if you are faithful in little things you will be faithful in big ones; if you are unrighteous in little things you will be unrighteous in big things (16:10).

The Pharisee's scoffing (vv.14-15) is much more serious than grumbling. Their reaction indicates that they perceive that the parables of Luke 15 were directed against them. The Pharisees, who represent the Jewish religious establishment while Jesus is outside Jerusalem, reject Jesus. (CC pp. 623-624)

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to use the many earthly gifts you give us to bring others into your kingdom. Help us to long for the lasting treasure in Christ to have a true perspective on money and goods. Amen