

# Perceptive Investment

Long Beach Alliance Church • August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.**

**~Luke 16:9 (ESV)**

## 1) Investing Gospel Resources In Unrighteousness

- A) Luke's Gospel contains more parable material than the other four Gospel narratives. "Riches" and "wealth" are significant themes both in Luke's Gospel, and in the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ.
- B) Luke's Gospel account always treats "riches" and "wealth" negatively,\* Luke 16 provides another good example of "riches and wealth" carrying inherently negative assumptions of unrighteousness.
- C) This is heightened as we observe Christ's Luke 16 audience. Jesus' own disciples (Luke 16:1), the "tax collectors and the sinners," and "the Pharisees and the scribes" (Luke 15:1) are all present<sup>†</sup> for Christ's famously misunderstood story regarding an "Unrighteous Manager."

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\* It is notable that in the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) that "wealth" (NASB); "property" (NIV, ESV); or "livelihood" (NKJV), is from βίον, normally translated "life." The word carries ideas of wealth/property, as expressions of that which an individual has spent their life achieving. The word "money," which is related to "livelihood," is not always used negatively (cf. Luke 21:4), but is often (as here in Luke 16:1-16) used as being a barrier between man's fellowship with God (cf. Luke 8:14; 15:12, 30). We can observe a semantic similarity between βίον (livelihood) & πλούτου, πλουσίους (wealth) and μαμωνᾶς (money) which maintains Luke's negative emphasis, as in the Prodigal Son parable.

## 2) A Pathetic Character Caught In His Own Deception

- A) Each instance of “manager” (Luke 16:1) in the book of Luke had a financial manager in view. Thus, the manager in charge of financial matters had squandered his master’s wealth and is called out for “an accounting” (Luke 16:2).
- B) Clearly, the negative information the “rich man” (remember, this has negative connotations) has about his manager is conclusive, because despite a request for accounting -- he fires his manager on the spot (16:2).
- C) Interestingly, the manager says nothing. Rather, we have an omniscient view of the manager’s guilt and panic as he considers a life without his job for the rich man (16:3).
- D) The manager’s aversion to hard work and shame at the thought of begging illustrate his pathetic nature (16:3) and heighten the obvious question, “what will this pathetic little man do now?!”

## 3) A Shrewd Move By A Stupid Man

- A) Just when you think the story is about a pathetic and foolish manager, the goat becomes more interesting as he hatches a plan, no doubt preposterous to the listener, to use his previous “squandering” for some sort of personal gain (16:4). What in the world is his plan? Can it work?

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Since the “tax-gatherers” were a group with a reputation for fraudulent monetary practices, they present an ideal audience for teaching about riches and wealth. Tax gatherers were among the most hated people in the Roman provinces (Judea & Galilee). The tax gatherers routinely charged “commissions,” on top of the required tax, in order to increase their own wealth. A tax gatherer often depended on “suspicion, intrusion, harassment and force” for success, which attracted unsavory characters for the job. It is no wonder that the popular view of tax gatherers (cf. the Pharisees in Luke 15:2) was that they were the “embodiment of dishonesty.” A parable involving deception, money, accusation, and over-charging would be ideal for this type of an audience. The Pharisees and Scribes (lawyers), who Luke reports “were lovers of money” (Luke 16:14), would have been another ideal audience for Christ’s teaching. Finally, Christ’s disciples, to whom the parable is directed (Luke 16:1), were being instructed in the priorities/values of God’s Kingdom. Their presence was equally significant, as part of God’s special inclusion of them in the “mysteries of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:10). (Collected from various resources, of particular focus is Schmidt, Thomas E., s.v. “Taxes.” *IVP Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. J.B. Green. I. Howard Marshall (Consulting Editor), Scot McKnight. 1992, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. Pages 805-806.)

- B) Without explanation, the manager summons his master's clients (16:5) and makes **dramatic reductions** (20% - 50%)<sup>Ω</sup> to their debt (16:6-7)!
- C) Certainly, the manager would be as good as dead when his master discovers that the money which the manager has already squandered is now being **given away**! At the very least, we expect the manager to go to jail for his offence.
- D) The master, however, has a **radically** different response to the situation (16:8). Why would the master praise his renegade manager? How were the actions of the manager "shrewd," in light of his apparent theft (by reduction)?
- E) Further, Jesus supports the positive estimation of the manager's actions, noting that the unrighteous manager distinguished himself as being more "shrewd" than those who are followers of God (16:8)!

#### 4) Possible Options/Problems For Gospel Solutions

- A) Why was the deceptive manager complimented in the story and by Jesus?! Some possible explanations are:
  - o<sup>1</sup>) The manager was reducing the debts of his master because it was within the discretion of his job.
  - p<sup>1</sup>) This solution is problematic because it would essentially be stealing from his master. This approach would have been condemned, rather than praised.
  - o<sup>2</sup>) The manager was stealing from his master, which was admired. The master was a mafia-boss with an extortion business, like a loan shark. Within these circles, the most conniving plan was admired.

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<sup>Ω</sup> The amounts reported here give us a better picture of the manager's job, and of the wealth of the rich man. "The quantities involved are quite huge. The oil would represent the annual yield of a very large olive grove. Similarly, the annual yield of wheat would represent twenty times the size of an average family plot. The master is dealing with large-scale business associates here, not with ordinary people and ordinary economic levels." Nolland, John. *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 9:21-18:34*. Vol. 35b, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (General Editor) & Ralph P. Martin (New Testament Editor): Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993. Page 799.

- p<sup>2</sup>) This solution is improbable, since it again results in the master losing money. In addition, this approach would probably not cause the manager to be trusted by the clients of his master -- thus becoming self-defeating.
- o<sup>3</sup>) The manager was overcharging a large percentage to his master's clients, which is what got him into trouble in the first place. Essentially, the forgiveness of debt was a removal of his outrageous personal commission.
- p<sup>3</sup>) No real problems with this solution. In fact, given the audience and the response of the rich master, this *mea culpa* solution has the greatest plausibility.

## 5) Gospel Investments Require Unrighteous

- A) Jesus teaches His followers to use expendable resources (the things which do not last) in a way which invests in God's Kingdom purposes (true riches which are eternal). This is accomplished through Gospel relationships with those who are unrighteous (16:9).
- B) The unrighteous (those who are not yet following Jesus) do not have the "key" to heaven (Jesus Christ, the eternal dwellings, 16:9) -- but you do!
- C) The outward behavior of Jesus' followers in unrighteous situations and environments reveals our hearts. In the same way that God invested in you, even when you did not love Him, we love others, even when they are not living lives which follow Jesus (Romans 5:6-8).
- D) Just as Jesus Christ "unlocked" your heavenly dwelling, He desires the same for all people (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:4)! A Gospel heart invests in those things which reach others for the sake of revealing the Gospel of Jesus (Luke 16:9).
- E) Thus, Jesus calls His followers to be faithful in all things (money, resources -- 16:10), investing in the Gospel (true riches -- 16:11-12), and be exclusively faithful to God (16:13) for Gospel purposes (spreading the fame of Jesus).