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Kingdom Economics – Luke 16:1-13

Introduction – We come to one of the most controverted parables in Luke; the interpretations are legion. Was this man a crook, and was Jesus telling us to be like this crook? In preaching through Luke, I continue to use Luke 1:3-4 as well as Luke's literary structures to help exposit and interpret the text.

An Interpretation in Context – There is no change of scene (from Luke 15 to 16), and so while the three stories of Luke 15 obviously fit together, 15:1 – 17:10 may be one extended passage. Notice the verbal links, “a certain man” (15:11, 16:1), and “squander” (15:13 and 16:1). In 15:1 Jesus is at table with *tax-collectors and sinners* as well as *Pharisees and scribes*, and Jesus continues to address both (15:3, 16:1, 14, 17:1). The Parable of the Lost Son addressed both groups of people and the Parable of the Unjust Steward appears to be in the same vein. The Pharisees deride Jesus for saying these things (v14) and so they understand that He is speaking against them.

An Exposition/Interpretation of the Passage –

A Certain Rich Man (v1) – God had entrusted to Israel the riches of His kingdom and the Pharisees have squandered it, abusing their offices, misusing the gifts God had given them for their own pleasure instead of ministering to the people (11:39-44). Word has reached the Master and judgment is about to fall.

New Stewards (v2) – A New Kingdom, a New Israel has come and the stewardship of the gospel is going to be taken away from Old Israel and given to new leaders.

The Wise Steward (vv3-4) – If Israel is to repent, she must be like the steward, who realizes that “*the last shall be first and the first shall be last.*” If the steward does not heed the Master, he will be put out. And his repentance must be followed up with actions. The wise Pharisees will see this, befriend the new “homeowners” and repent of their former exploitation.

Reducing Debts (vv5-7) – The steward (repentant Israel) needs to change the way he has cared for the master's debtors (the rest of Israel, or the downtrodden – poor). It is possible that the amount the steward reduces the bill represents his own personal commission (for the master commends him). If so, this could represent the many additional burdens the Pharisees had placed on sinners (Matt 23:1-4, 14). In the Oral Law traditions of the Pharisees, debts or trespasses required a monetary payment to the Temple in order to be restored. In the parable, the steward is making friends of those he was tyrannizing before because they will be the ones to receive him into the kingdom (their houses) later.

Wise Sons (v8) – The Jewish leaders considered themselves the “sons of light,” and so it seems that Jesus is rebuking those leaders. In a position of power, wealth and prestige, the Pharisees have not grown the kingdom with those gifts, but made themselves more and more elite and exclusive, seeking their own power and wealth.

Applications From Jesus – It is also helpful to let Christ comment on His own parable. Here is what He says.

Make Friends By Unrighteous Mammon (v9) – An Aramaic word meaning “wealth,” Jesus does not call it unrighteous as though we shouldn't have any. It is unrighteous in that it will fail you if you put your trust in it. But we are to use our worldly wealth (and any and all gifts we have from God) never to exclude others, but rather to serve others so that they might one day receive us with them into a home that will last forever.

Testing Faithfulness (vv10-12) – If you are not faithful in the little things, or the things that will perish one day, do not expect that the Lord will entrust you with the true, heavenly things. Israel was known for lording over her own (Mic 2:1-2, 3:1-5 as examples). And there is a profound truth to consider in v12 – this life is just a stewardship (someone else's) for which we will give an account. Afterwards, in heaven, that is the place where we will truly have things of “our own.”

You Cannot Serve God and Mammon (v13) – Everyone in places of authority has to deal with money. The problem Jesus was addressing is that the scribes and Pharisees had let the love of money get the better of their offices as teachers of the people. Paul warned Timothy in his office of teacher of the same thing (1 Tim 6:6-16, also 2 Tim 4:1-5).

Final Exhortation – Of this passage, Calvin wrote, “*The leading object of this parable is, to show that we ought to deal kindly and generously with our neighbors; that, when we come to the judgment seat of God, we may reap the fruit of our liberality.*” In this passage, Jesus is teaching us that decisions about our money, positions, and possessions are never decisions about those things really; they are decisions about the directions and aims of our life. They reveal something deep about our character. What do you love

most? Look at the entries in your checkbook.

Small Tasks – Really, everything on this earth is a small task, whether you are cleaning a bathroom or merging multi-billion dollar companies. In both situations, God is looking at your heart; are you serving mammon or God? Greater responsibility is given to those who show themselves faithful in the smaller things.

Removed Lampstand (Rev 2:5) – Whether to an individual, a church, a nation, even to a generation, the warning is the same: to whom much is given, much is required. Jerusalem fell. Europe has fallen. America is falling. The lampstand of the church will be taken from those who squander what has been entrusted and given to others when God's stewards selfishly exploit their gifts rather than using them to do the Father's will. *Dave Hatcher – October 1, 2006*