

The Unjust Steward

This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's website, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Feb. 4, 2017

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LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—If there is one parable that causes constant head-scratching, it is the Parable of the Unjust Steward. In this parable, Jesus seems to praise a man who goes out of his way to defraud his employer. We know that can't be right, so I am going to submit a theory of my own.

First, a little background.

The parable is found in Luke 16:1-13. The text tells us there were Pharisees listening in (verse 14), but His primary audience was his disciples (verse 1). For the public at large, many of His parables were by design obscure. But He told His disciples that, even though the general public saw many of these parables as mysteries, the disciples themselves were given to understanding (Matthew 13:11-17).

This Parable of the Unjust Steward was something He expected His disciples to take to heart—especially given a hidden corruption that was lurking in His inner circle.

I will offer here that this parable, while directed to all the disciples, was directed at one of them specifically. This parable, I think, was given as a warning to Judas Iscariot.

Let's take a look at this parable and see how Judas might have heard it in his own head. Remember as you read this that Judas was the treasurer of Jesus' Band of Twelve, and as such he was pilfering from the money bag (John 12:6). If there was ever an unjust steward, it was Judas Iscariot.

Here is how Judas's head might have interpreted Jesus' words.

- There was a rich man who had a treasurer, and this treasurer was reported to him as an embezzler.
- Are you listening, everybody?
- And he called the treasurer and said to him, "Judas, what is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be treasurer."
- The treasurer said to himself, "What shall I do, since my boss is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I'm

ashamed to beg. I know what I'll do! If I act now, when I am removed from management, people will welcome me into their homes!"

■ And he summoned each one of his boss's debtors, and he began saying to the first, "How much do you owe my boss?"

■ And he said, "A hundred measures of oil."

■ And he said to him, "Take your bill, and sit down quickly and give me a mere 30 pieces of silver."

■ Then he said to another, "And how much do you owe?"

■ And he said, "A hundred measures of wheat."

■ He said to him, "Take your bill, and give me another 30 pieces of silver."

■ I have to give this unrighteous treasurer some credit because he acted shrewdly. The people of this world are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.

■ I am giving you permission, Judas, to make friends for yourself by means of the wealth of unrighteousness. You are going to fail here. When you do, you'll need a place to live. You will need to find a benefactor who will be willing to give you a place to stay because the road you are going down won't get you an eternal dwelling with me.

■ I'm giving you permission to resign your position and walk away.

■ Listen to me, Judas. He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much. He who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, my friend, who will entrust the true riches to you?

■ Judas, I'm putting you on notice. You are failing the test. If you have not been faithful in the use of money that belongs to someone else, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You need to make a choice, my friend. You are getting mighty close to the edge. Which will it be: God or mammon?

I realize that Jesus' audience and the depth of His teachings applied to more than just Judas. But Jesus was a subtle teacher. He knew that each of us has his own needs and will hear His teachings in light of those needs.

When we read His parables, do we take them to heart as instruction given in love? Or are we like Judas, hearing but not heeding?