

# The Unjust Steward

THE MAN WHO LOST HIS JOB

by Jack Wilhelm

## Introduction:

*Luke 16:1-13*

The government releases figures regularly about the unemployment rate. Our national economy is affected when people are out of a job. To combat unemployment, much effort is directed to educate and train potential workers with skills so they can become contributing members of society.

Many families have known panic and insecurity when the breadwinner's job is terminated. The Bible records in Luke 16:1-13 the story of a man who lost his job.

## I. SOME BACKGROUND FACTS THAT WILL HELP US UNDERSTAND THE STORY:

- A. The characters in the story are (1) a certain rich man, and (2) his steward.
  - 1. There is a need to review the subject of *stewardship*. Absentee landlords would often appoint a key person (called a steward) to manage their property. Eg. Eliezer was Abraham's steward (Gen. 15:2) and Joseph was the steward over Potiphar's house (Gen. 39:14).
  - 2. A steward *possesses* (or occupies) but he does not *own*. He is responsible to the owner for faithful management and productive use of what is entrusted to him (Note: We are stewards of what God has entrusted to us.)
- B. (Relate the story.) Bible scholars are generally agreed that the rich man (owner) in this story represents God, (though Barclay calls him a "rascal".)

## II. LESSONS FROM THE STORY OF THE UNJUST STEWARD:

A. *We learn that we should not draw hasty conclusions or act impulsively merely on the basis of hearsay or rumor.*

### 1. Luke 16:1-2:

The steward was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods... And he called him and said unto him, How is it

that I hear this of thee? give account of thy stewardship. . . .

2. He did not make explosive charges to everyone but the steward. He investigated.
3. The following tests have been suggested as safeguards against harmful gossip and rumor mongering:
  - a. Is it true? Christians should not spread falsehoods. Titus 3:2; Eph. 4:31
  - b. Even if true, is it wise? Will it edify? Is it necessary?
  - c. Even if true, is it possible that it will do harm? damage the innocent? (Someone has said, "Christians should always tell the truth, but not necessarily always be telling it.")
  - d. Would I say this in the personal presence of the person? ("Slander is something one says behind your back, but not to your face; Flattery is something one says to your face but not behind your back." Both are condensed.)
  - e. Will it pass the Golden Rule test? If conditions were reversed, would I want the other person to broadcast this about me?

*B. A primary responsibility of life is to meet our obligations and make a living.*

1. v. 3-4 When the steward learned he had lost his job, his first concern was "What shall I do?" He tried to provide for his survival.
2. God expects us to make a living in an honorable way, Eph. 4:28; Gen. 3:19. (Cf. Gen. 2:15 Adam had a job even before he sinned.)
3. The church and society may legitimately show compassion and help those in need, Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim 5:16. But to have several succeeding generations still expecting handouts is wrong, 2 Thess. 3:6-12. The ancient Jews said, "If you do not teach your child a trade, you do the same as if you taught him to be a thief."

*Illust.* A young man, after he was grown, came to his father and said, "I want to thank you for making me work when I was a teenager. At the time, I thought you were unfair, because all my friends had no restrictions and few chores. Now, when I see what has happened to them, I know that you knew best. I always wondered how you knew exactly how many chores to lay out for me each day to keep me busy until you got home."

C. *The beauty of a good deed can be tarnished by an ugly motive.*

1. v. 4-7 "I am resolved what to do ... that they may receive me..."
2. The steward accommodated the creditors and discounted their goods. Ordinarily this could have been a good deed, but his motive was wrong and he was not honestly able to do what he did.
3. Some Bible examples of impure motives that corrupted otherwise commendable actions:
  - a. Matt. 2: 8 Herod sought the Christ child, not to worship as he said, but kill.
  - b. Matt. 26: 48-49 Judas' kiss was to betray Jesus, not a real affectionate greeting.
  - c. Matt. 6: 1-8 Jesus condemned outward religious exercises done only for show.
4. What about us? Friendly at services only to get people to return? Give, only to be seen and praised of men? Help the needy as a grim duty or out of genuine compassion?

D. *While not approving sins, we do need to see the good points in others as well as their faults.*

1. v. 8 "Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely..."
2. The man's thievery was not condoned, but he did have some good points. He had a problem which he recognized, and he directed his energies to try to solve it.
3. Burton Coffman, in his *Commentary on Luke*, p. 348, says the following:
  1. He told himself the truth.
  2. He took account of his own need which would not diminish merely because he had lost his job.
  3. He accurately appraised the necessity to make some provision against that future need, even as Christ himself commanded (Rev. 3: 18).
  4. He used those things which he yet controlled in order to meet that inevitable future need.
  5. He acted at once with all possible speed.
  6. He acted with brilliant efficiency and thoroughness.

4. God could still love us in spite of our glaring sins. All people will do better when given credit for their good points, though their flaws still need correction.

*E. God's people can learn some valuable lessons, even from non-religious people.*

1. v. 8 "...the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light ..."
2. The business world has learned to plan ahead with vision and foresight. We may learn from their methods without being disloyal to the message.
  - a. Note the world's judgment at location of their buildings and their upkeep. (We see many illkept church buildings in or across the tracks where no business man would dare try to operate a business he was trying to expand.)
  - b. The business world provides its workers with training, good equipment to work with, and motivation incentives to boost morale.
  - c. The business world uses positive advertising ideas and quality workmanship.

*Illust.* The church often pays well to have a gospel meeting but makes very little effort to get people to hear the messenger. It criticizes a minister for not being out of the office more as a "good mixer" while tying him down in an office two to three days a week to publish a bulletin on antiquated equipment that others could do.

*F. Christians should use their money to help them go to heaven.*

1. v. 9 "Make friends of the mammon... that...they may receive you into everlasting habitations..."
2. The only everlasting habitations would have to be our eternal home. Jesus is saying that the world uses money to secure an earthly future; how much more should the wise children of God use earthly wealth to secure their heavenly future. The use of a little is viewed by the Lord as an index to reflect what we would do with more, and whether to entrust us with the true riches.
3. Caution: No one is saying for one moment that a person can buy entrance to heaven. But the Bible does teach that our use of material

wealth is connected with our preparation for enjoyment of the true heavenly riches. Cf. Phil. 4: 15- 19; 1 Tim 6: 10- 12, 17- 19\*

4. Other scriptures to consider: Luke 12: 33; Mt. 6: 20, 24; Matt. 19: 21; Luke 14: 14; Lk. 16: 9- 13.

**Conclusion:**

Jesus closed this story by telling us that "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (V. 13).

Each of us--at this very moment--is either putting God first or things of the world first. Which is it with you? There are TRUE RICHES, the like of which this world has not seen and can never offer. We ask you to submit to God now and be faithful that they may be a reality when the time comes to enter the "everlasting habitations."