

WHY JESUS COMMENDS A CROOK

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Luke 16:1-8

"JESUS, MONEY, AND YOU" SERIES
#4, WHY JESUS COMMENDS A CROOK
LUKE 16: 1-13 (P. 740)
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INTRODUCTION

-- In His teaching ministry Jesus didn't shy away from being controversial. At times, He even says things in deliberately disturbing ways. But the story He tells in the passage we're going to consider today is perhaps the most puzzling and shocking of all. Jesus tells the story of a crook and then commends him as an example for us.

So let's take a look at it to see if we can figure out why Jesus does such a strange thing. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 16 (p.740).

I. THE PARABLE (VV. 1-8)

-- The parable begins by describing a tense situation involving a wealthy man and the servant who is his steward, what we might call today a business manager.

A. THE SITUATION (VV. 1-2)

-- The two characters in this story are the rich man and the man who serves as his steward or manager, who is in charge of the rich man's business affairs and, as we see later in the story, is authorized to enter into contractual business agreements for the master.

-- Obviously, a man entrusted to this extent should be a completely trustworthy person with unquestionable integrity. However, questions about the manager's integrity have arisen, and in fact, charges have been made against him that he is guilty of "wasting [the master's] possessions." The term used here is the same word used in the last chapter to describe the way the prodigal son squandered the money he received from his father. The implication is that the manager has been diverting funds and possessions that belonged to the master to use for himself.

-- The rich man calls in his servant and demands that he present the account books for a thorough audit.

B. THE DILEMMA (VV. 3-4)

-- The manager's dilemma is that the audit of the business books will show that he's guilty and will soon lose his job and have to find new employment. As he thinks about the future there are two main options - manual labor or begging - and neither is appealing. The crooked manager is too weak to do manual labor and too proud to become a beggar.

As he thinks about what he's going to do, he comes up with a third option - one that he hopes will open different doors once he's shut out of his present position.

C. THE SCHEME (VV. 5-7)

-- One-by-one the crooked manager calls in the rich man's debtors and proceeds to fix the books in their favor. One man owes 800 gallons of oil, and the manager reduces it in half to 400 gallons. Another man owes 1,000 bushels of wheat, and the manager reduces it to 800.

-- The manager's thinking is that those who have had their debts reduced will be so grateful that they will offer him some kind of employment or assistance once he's out on the streets.

D. THE MASTER'S RESPONSE (V. 8)

-- Now we come to the shocking part of the parable - the way the master responds when learns what the crooked business manager has done.

Cf., v. 8

-- We'd expect the master to be outraged at the crooked actions of the business manager; instead, the master expresses a kind of admiration for the dishonest manager and commends him for being clever and acting shrewdly.

-- And that, my friends, is the end of the parable.
-- So what are we to make of this odd story - of Jesus' using this crooked business manager as a role model?

II. THE MEANING

A. THE MAIN POINT OF THE PARABLE

-- First, let's consider what is the main point Jesus is making in the parable?
-- The master in the parable commends the servant not just because he was shrewd but because he was shrewd in doing what?

He was shrewd in preparing for the future. That's the main point of the parable - to emphasize the necessity of preparing for the future judgment. Like the manager in the story, all of us will also face a future day of accounting.

For those apart from Christ it will be a time of judgment to eternal separation from God. For those who know Christ there will also be a time of judgment - not to determine eternal destiny because our eternal life is secure in Christ; instead the future judgment we will face will be an examination of how well we have served as stewards or managers of the life God has entrusted to us.

2 Cor. 5:9-10 So we make it our goal to please [the Lord], whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

-- The purpose of the parable is to urge God's people to be at least as concerned about the future day of accounting as the crooked manager was.

B. HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE JUDGMENT (VV. 9-13)

-- Then in verses 9-13 Luke gives us 3 of Jesus' teachings that instruct us in how to prepare for the future judgment.

1. Use Your Money and Resources with Eternity in Mind. (v. 9)

-- When it comes to matters of money and possessions, the natural tendency is to live for today and for this world. After all, most of us have enough trouble just making it one day at a time and to keep from running out of money before we run out of month.

-- But Jesus calls those who follow Him to a different perspective on their lives. Notice to whom the parable is addressed in verse 1 - to Jesus' disciples. Those who know and follow Christ must live their lives in light of eternity.

That's not easy. The struggles and challenges we face tend to make us focus on the here and now. That's why spending daily time reading the Bible and praying and why getting together each week for worship is so important - those are things that re-focus our lives and keep us looking at life from the perspective of eternity.

-- Now, Jesus tells us in verse 9 that one way to live in light of eternity is to use our money to "gain friends" who will welcome us into eternal dwellings. The only friends who can do this are those who have come to faith in Christ. So what Jesus may be saying to us here is that we need to be investing our money in the Kingdom of God, in the work of the church so that we can bring people to know and follow Christ, people who will share eternity with us.

-- Remember the words to the old Ray Boltz song, "Thank You for Giving to the Lord"?
I dreamed I went to Heaven, you were there with me.
We walked upon the streets of gold beside the Crystal Sea.
We heard the angels singing, then someone called your name.
You turned and saw this young man, and he was smiling as he came.
He said, "Friend you may not know me now," and then he said, "But wait -
You used to teach my Sunday School, when I was only eight.
And every week you would say a prayer before the class would start.
And one day when you said that prayer,
I asked Jesus in my heart."

Then another man stood before you, he said "Remember the time,
A missionary came to your church, His pictures made you cry.
You didn't have much money but you gave it anyway.
Jesus took that gift you gave

And that's why I'm in Heaven today"

Chorus

Thank you for giving to the Lord,
I am a life that was changed.
Thank you for giving to the Lord,
I am so glad you gave,
I am so glad you gave.

One by one they came, far as your eyes could see.
Each life somehow touched by your generosity.
Little things that you had done, sacrifices that you made,
Unnoticed on this earth
In Heaven now proclaimed.

And I know up in Heaven you're not supposed to cry
But I am almost sure there were tears in your eyes
As Jesus took your hand and you stood before the Lord
He said "My child look around you,
Great is your reward."

Chorus

Thank you for giving to the Lord,
I am a life that was changed.
Thank you for giving to the Lord,
I am so glad you gave,
I am so glad you gave.

2. Live as Faithful Servants. (vv. 10-12)

-- The things that God puts in our possession are tests of our faithfulness.

-- It's interesting from the perspective of heaven money and possessions are considered the "little" things of life.

I read a story about the rock band Van Halen. They kept having technical problems in their concerts, mainly because the promoters would overlook some parts of the contracts that specified technical matters that were small but very important. So the band started putting a provision in the contract that required the promoters to have backstage a bowl of M&Ms with all the brown M&Ms removed and if that wasn't done the band could cancel the concert and still receive full payment. The idea was that the band knew that if they found the bowl of M&Ms and looked in it and didn't find any brown M&Ms that the promoters had faithfully read the contract and paid attention to the small but important matters.

-- Well, money and possessions are like heaven's brown M&Ms. If we're using these small things faithfully, then God knows we can be trusted with greater things.

3. Be Careful Who or What You're Living for. (v. 13)

-- There's an old Bob Dylan song that says "you're gonna have to serve somebody. Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody."

-- That's true for all of us - we're either going to serve the Lord or serve someone or something else. One of the biggest battles for those who are disciples in this culture is the pull to serve money instead of God.

-- A good question to ask yourself is what is the main driving force in your life - what is the main thing you're living for - to know and serve Christ or to make money and obtain the pleasures and possessions it can buy.

CONCLUSION

Francis of Assisi was a great leader in the renewal and revival of the church in the 13th century. He was born into the family of a wealthy Italian merchant and according to a biographer squandered much of his early life in pursuing pleasures and possessions. But when Francis was in his twenties he had a serious illness and began searching for God. One day he walked by a small dilapidated chapel and felt a call to go inside to pray. As he prayed, the Lord spoke to him in a way that had never happened before and told him, "Francis, go and repair my house, which as you can see, is being destroyed."

Francis was stunned by this experience but got up and went and sold some of his possessions in order to get enough money to repair the chapel where he had been praying.

Later, God would use Francis to repair His church in a much greater way. The 13th-century church as a whole was in disrepair - plagued with spiritual apathy, materialism, and moral corruption. God used Francis to bring a renewed spirituality to the church.

But it began with Francis' faithfully fixing up that little chapel.

When we are faithful in the small things, God will entrust greater things to us.

And as we faithfully serve God with whatever He puts into our possession and care, we are preparing ourselves well for the day when the books of our lives will be opened by Christ and He will examine our stewardship.