



“Giving It Away”

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September 22, 2019

Scripture (CEB):

Luke 16:1-13

16 Jesus said to the disciples, “A certain rich man heard that his household manager was wasting his estate. ² He called the manager in and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give me a report of your administration because you can no longer serve as my manager.’

³ “The household manager said to himself, What will I do now that my master is firing me as his manager? I’m not strong enough to dig, and too proud to beg. ⁴ I know what I’ll do so that, when I am removed from my management position, people will welcome me into their houses.

⁵ “One by one, the manager sent for each person who owed his master money. He said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ He said, ‘Nine hundred gallons of olive oil.’ The manager said to him, ‘Take your contract, sit down quickly, and write four hundred fifty gallons.’ ⁷ Then the manager said to another, ‘How much do you owe?’ He said, ‘One thousand bushels of wheat.’ He said, ‘Take your contract and write eight hundred.’

⁸ “The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted cleverly. People who belong to this world are more clever in dealing with their peers than are people who belong to the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to make friends for yourselves so that when it’s gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal homes.

¹⁰ “Whoever is faithful with little is also faithful with much, and the one who is dishonest with little is also dishonest with much. ¹¹ If you haven’t been faithful with worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² If you haven’t been faithful with someone else’s property, who will give you your own? ¹³ No household servant can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Sermon:

I wish I could show you when you are lonely or in darkness the astonishing light of your own being. Hafiz

Many commentators and scholars scratch their heads over this parable.
How about you? Do you find it confusing?

Why is that guy getting commended by his boss, after his boss has found his mismanaging his wealth, and is getting ready to fire him?

What is going on here!?

What is Jesus talking about, telling his friends, the “children of light” to be more clever with money, using wealth to make friends?

Did any of this text make you squirm?

Did any of you think, I need to pick up my bible and read this one again?

Good, I’m glad I’m not the only one who looked at this text and wondered, “WHAT?”

I’ve discovered this week, that some commentators believed, (rather unbelievably if you ask me) that the manager was simply removing the interest from the debts and taking them on himself, as he tried to make friends and find people he could go to once he was fired.

But he starts out as disreputable and “untrustworthy” by his boss; what on earth would make him take on someone else’s debt?

Bluntly, I doubt it. Not to mention the fact that no interest rates in the world are as high as 100%, which is what you get when you cut that 900 gallons of oil in half, as he did. He’s not just cutting out interest...he is actually cutting the bill in half.

Does he have authority to do that? Barely. He is thinking fast, and acts quickly since he’s just been fired.

I actually think, he is still cheating his boss. It seems pretty clear to me, that yes, he is protecting himself against the future by cheating his boss!

Even our bibles can't agree on what is going on...one says "the parable of the dishonest steward", one says, "the parable of the shrewd manager"...who is this guy??

I'll tell you what...I think Jesus is saying just what it seems to be saying...he is cheating, he is dishonest, he is shrewd...all at the same time.

Because, the whole system is rigged. The entire system of wealth is rigged against that manager, but he wants some of it, and can't get to that money without playing against the rules of business in that day.

So, he cheats his boss. And gets caught and fired. And cheats his boss some more.

There is nothing in this parable that is gonna make it easy on anybody with money in the circle of people listening to Jesus that day (or right now, either!).

Because, I hear Jesus saying, the system is rigged against most. And if you have to cheat, so be it. Be cleverer than the ones who are keeping you down.

(Parables like this are a major reason Jesus was crucified...because he most definitely was telling stories that undermine the authority of the ruling powers; the Romans and their collaborators, the conquerors who stole everything and anything they wanted, from the conquered.)

But that wasn't all; when that shrewd manager did have money, Jesus told him, and his followers, *use it to make friends*. He says, give it away freely that you prove you know what to do with money.

And as the parable we heard a few weeks ago reminds us...(the one about the man who died just when all his stuff had been gathered into his new and expanded barns)...you prove you know what to do with wealth...when you give it away.

I hear Jesus saying, “share it”. Make friends with it. Share it - so there is peace through money, not starving neighbors, not abandoned foreigners, not hungry widows.

Like so many other messages of healing and restoration; Jesus bluntly tells his friends and followers that their money is not theirs...it is to give away. Release debts. Use it for others.

Show that they can use it wisely, cause it is just money, but if they can be trusted to know what to do with that little transitory thing, then they can be trusted by God in eternity.

You can't serve God and money. You will love one and not the other. That's what Jesus says.

Ok then. Serve God with your money. Serve God by using your money to make the world a better place.

Millionaires do it. Bill and Melinda Gates for example.

But you don't have to be a millionaire either.

What can we do?...

- You and I can begin by admitting that our system is rigged, keeping brown and black people poor, uneducated people poor, immigrants and undocumented workers poor...and we can undermine that system.
- With our money and our power and our voices we can demand a more just system for working people, decent pay, benefits, and access to opportunity and power.
- We can acknowledge our part in being the wealthiest nation on earth by exploiting the resources of so many other nations for our own benefit, with little benefit to them.

It isn't enough to know that we are rich when others are poor. We have to be smart enough to undermine the entire system, to see our part in its cruelties, and say we repent of it, and will no longer tolerate it.

We have to fight it.

There are plenty of ways to do this: it doesn't have to mean violent revolution, (though that happens sometimes too).

- We can fight for unions that protect workers, with a living wage, a safe work environment, benefits to families and to workers.

- We can stand against oppressive, racist legislation, push back against hateful attitudes and myths in our nation.
- And stand with laws and lawmakers who defend our planet over blind profit.
- We can recognize the American prison industry for what it is: industries built on depriving people of color of their human dignity, their life and liberty.
- We can do something.
- Each of us can do something.

I can't tell you how much you can do.

But Jesus suggests that we might have to be sly; undermine the unfairness of the whole crooked thing, in whatever way we can.

- It may mean; giving the wealth away instead of hanging on to it. Be generous with your wealth, don't be afraid to give a bunch away! (I have a sister with enough money, and she is always giving some of it away. I call her a one woman "wealth redistribution system").
- Ya know, it can be as straightforward as sharing your coats in your closet, or your famous peach crisp, with a neighbor. Not just with a friend, but a stranger, the neighbor you *don't* know. The neighbor who wears a hijab? The neighbor who talks to himself?

If it all feels too big, try to remember Greta Thunberg! Maybe you have seen the pictures? One girl, striking alone at her school last year, and millions across the world, striking this year.

And there is this: Pray. Remember God's capacity is beyond ours. Let it go. Stop and seek wisdom and clarity and peace and guidance. Ask for help from the One who holds all things. Loves all things, including you and me.