

God's Justice Over The World

A Weapon of the Weak

Luke 16:1-9

Many find this parable as the hardest to interpret. Where can we find God in it? The master? Commending the shrewd or prudent steward? Let's look at some of the details of the parable. These debts were large so they were probably from commercial borrowing or renting. In the ancient world a good turn by the steward was always returned. Public honor required that the debtors return the favor. The steward had his future secure.* He also could claim to be following God's law by subtracting the illegal interest from the debt!

1. Read verses 1-7. Interest on unstable olive oil was 50% and for more stable wheat, 20%. . Was it right for the steward to eliminate these debts?
2. Why didn't the manager fire the steward before he could make these deals? Did he actually fire him after commending him?
3. Read v. 8-9. Was the steward prudently following God? Do you think the rich man fired him? Can [community organizations](#) be "shrewd" and Godly?

* See John Nolland, WORD BIBLICAL COMMENTARY - LUKE 9:21 - 18:34, 1993, p. 803.

"The law of God ... provided by direct enactment that loans at interest by Jews to Jews were unlawful (Dt 15:7f; 23:20f; Ex 22:2; Lv 25:36f). ... Contracts and acknowledgements of indebtedness were specially suspect. ... If by any chance, 'increase' might accrue to the 'lender' the contract was morally bad. (p56, 60) ...

"According to God's law, the tainted property did not belong to the master ... the steward's gain was a personal gain whenever he took usury ... release (was) a payment out of the steward's own pocket. ... Liquidating debts and restating them in terms of natural products was a characteristic Jewish practice, the reason being precisely this desire to evade the law of biblical usury."(p 62, 68)

(Derrett, J. Duncan M., LAW IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, 1970)

Salvation and Riches

The Unbridgeable Chasm?

Luke 16:19-31

The first theme of this parable relates to salvation. We can learn from the second theme of the proper use of wealth in this present world. These two extreme figures (beggar and rich man) hardly ever saw or touched each other. Yet, God's power touched the two! Does God bring such people together today? Can [community organization](#) enable such meetings? Yes, experience has shown that large numbers of less powerful have met the rich and powerful.

1. Read v. 19-25. There is no mention that Lazarus believed. So, why did God save Lazarus but sent the rich man to hell? How do rich and poor relate today?

2. Read v. 26. [The reign of God](#) is among us ([see study 1](#)). So does God then empower "the saints, the people of the Most High" (Daniel 7:27) through community organization to reach over the chasm and reach the rich and powerful?

2. Read v. 27-31. Comment on the sufficiency of the Old Testament for repentance (v. 30) and revealing God's will (v. 31)

"It is true that the rich man suffers in the next life just because he was rich in life, while the poor man is blessed in the next life just because he was poor in this life. ... The juxtaposition ... expresses the parable's point of view without any moralizing between the lines." ("The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels," Richard Bauckham, NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES, 37 (1991), 232-3, 236)

"Assign meaning to the details of parables which Jesus' original audiences could have been expected to discern. ... Because one can never be sure just how many of the subordinate details in a narrative are meant to carry extra freight, there is always an elusiveness to allegory to entice the curious." (Blomberg, Craig L. [Interpreting The Parables](#), Intervarsity Press, 1990, p. 166-7)

Persistence in Seeking Justice

Luke 18:1-8

This unjust judge can't be a God figure as an allegory for us to persistently pray to God to come soon. Jesus could have picked a more comforting person such as a good shepherd or a good parent. How ironic that this person neither feared God nor protected a powerless widow. The widow persists her claim for justice just as we should. She doesn't denounce the judge (personal attack) but demands again and again that he do his duty. Can interpretation of this parable be both spiritual and earthly, thus following Blomberg rather than Julicher (see below)?

1. Read v. 2-3. Write about the two characters - the judge and the widow.
2. Read v. 4-5. What happened? Can God bring about justice through an unjust judge? Does persistence pay off now? Was this an example of "not give up" or can you only interpret this parable as praying for the coming of the Lord (v. 1 & 8)? (see below)
3. Read v. 6-8. Given that the "kingdom of God is in your midst" (Lk 17:22), "getting justice quickly" can be now before the Parousia. Can God work now through a judge and a widow before the Son of Man comes?

"The scholar, at the turn of the 19th Century, who almost singlehandedly demolished the allegorical interpretation of the parables, was the German liberal Adolf Julicher. ... each parable makes one point." (Interpreting The Parables by Craig L. Blomberg, IV Press, 1990, p. 32, 165) "It is virtually impossible to limit a given parable to one single meaning." (Blomberg's Jesus and the Gospels, Broadman & Holman, 1997, p. 260)

"Jesus went beyond offering personal aid to the needy; he prophetically denounced the sins of the powerful in his world. Christians should feel an obligation to speak out in similar fashion today on behalf of the oppressed and exploited." (Interpreting The Parables, p. 307)

A Living Wage for All

Matthew 20: 1-16

The landowner paid each of his workers a "just" wage (v. 4), what was necessary for a livelihood! Wow! We should not lose sight of this point even through the primary focus of this parable is about God's way and salvation. The landowner made this just point twice by defending his equal payments as "not unjust." (v. 13) Yes, the last will be first but also this parable must have spoken to listeners of Jesus about being paid a wage sufficient to live.

1. Read v. 1-10. Write a paragraph on this story with a total earthly emphasis.
2. Read v. 11-15. Making people "equal to us" (*compare 2 Corinthians 8:13-15*) is good, generous and not unjust! Comment on this being a living wage teaching (see below).
3. Read Mt 19:30 and 20:16. Write your response to the interpretation of Mott (see below) that the primary focus is upon "membership in Jesus' new society."
'Would the last to enter the membership be first?

"A parable is an earthly comparison to teach a truth about God's new way ... The primary focus of this parable is upon membership in Jesus' new society and standing within it. ... The parable applies to the earthly story in the language and content of biblical justice. ... The first and longest workers received what they needed for sustenance. They were not treated "unjustly." (v. 13) Biblical distributive justice is a rendering to each according to their need. ... The Good Farmer is both our savior and our model. The church's long battle for the living wage for all workers, a battle encouragingly revived recently, finds support for its conviction in the image itself of this parable." (["Sufficient Wages and the The Reign of God"](#), Stephen Mott, Christian Social Action, October 1999.)