

**The Parable of the Dishonest Steward
(25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)**

Amos 8:4-7—Oracle against Those Who Oppress the Poor

1. Oppression: trample on the “needy” and destroy the “poor” (8:4)
2. Economic Injustice: changing weights and measures (8:5-7; price manipulation)

Psalms 113—The LORD lifts up the Poor

1. Poor: God has a special love for the “poor” or “needy” (v. 7)

1 Timothy 2:1-8—Prayers Should be Made for All People

1. Intercessions: should be offered “for all men” (2:1)—including kings!

Luke 16:1-13—The Parable of the Dishonest Steward

1. One of Jesus’ Most Difficult Parables:
 - Amy-Jill Levine: “the parable defies any fully satisfactory explanation” (*Jewish Annotated New Testament*, p. 149)
2. Parable of the Dishonest Steward (16:1-9)
 - a. Rich Man: “rich man” (Greek *plousios*)
 - b. Steward: “steward” (Greek *oikonomos*; cf. English “economy”)
 - c. Charge: “Wasting” (Greek *diaskorpizō*) rich man’s “goods” (cf. Luke 15:13)
 - d. Judgment: turn in report of your “stewardship” (Greek *oikonomia*)
 - e. Problem: too weak to “dig” (day-laborer); ashamed to “beg” (destitute)
2. Solution: summons his master’s “debtors”; depicts the master as very generous
 - a. 100 Measures of Oil → pays only 50
 - b. 100 Measures of Wheat → pays only 80
 - c. Theft: he pays down their debts with his “master’s” (Greek *kyrios*) money!
 - d. Unjust: that is why he’s called the “unjust” or “wicked” (Greek *adikia*) (16:8)
3. Twist:
 - a. Commendation: “master” commended the “dishonest steward”!
 - b. Prudence: because he acted “prudently/shrewdly” (Greek *phronimōs*) (16:8)!
4. Upshot (Hebrew *Nimshal*): what is the point of the parable?
 - a. Sons of This World: “wiser in their own generation” than
 - b. Sons of Light: found in John 12:36 and DSS (1QS 1-3; 1QM 1)
 - c. Unrighteous Mammon (Greek *mamōna tēs adikias*) = “stolen money”!
 - d. Make Friends: pay off other people’s “debts” with the “master/Lord’s” money
 - e. Eternal Habitations: “eternal tents/tabernacles” (Greek *skēnē*; cf. 2 Esdras 2:11)
5. General Maxims about Wealth: tied by *catchwords* and *themes* to preceding (16:10-13)
 - a. Little vs. Much: faithful in “very little”; faithful also in “much”
 - b. Earthly Mammon vs. True Riches: (cf. Luke 12:21, 33-34)
 - c. Another’s Property vs. Your Own Property: (cf. Mishnah, *Aboth* 2:12)

d. God vs. Mammon (Greek *mamōna* = “wealth”) (cf. Matt 6:24)

The Living Tradition

Ephrem the Syrian: The perverse astuteness of this unjust steward was praised in the presence of his master. For he had unjustly squandered the initial treasures, and then unjustly and cunningly remitted the later debts. He was praised, therefore, because, by means of that which was not his, he set about acquiring that which was to be his, namely friends and supporters... Buy for yourselves, O sons of Adam, those things which do not pass away, by means of those transitory things which are not yours! (Ephrem, *Commentary on Tatian’s Diatesseron* 14.21; trans. C. McCarthy)

Augustine: Why did the Lord Jesus Christ present this parable to us? *He surely did not approve of that cheat of a servant who cheated his master, stole from him, and did not make it up from his own pocket.* On top of that, he also did some extra pilfering. *He caused his master further loss,* in order to prepare a little nest of quiet and security for himself after he lost his job. Why did the Lord set this before us? *It is not because that servant cheated but because he exercised foresight for the future.* When even a cheat is praised for ingenuity, Christians who make no such provision blush. I mean, this is what he added, ‘Behold, the children of this age are more prudent than the children of light.’ They perpetrate frauds in order to secure their future. In what life, after all, did that steward insure himself like that? What one as he going to quit when he bowed to his master’s decision? *He was insuring himself for a life that was going to end. Would you not insure yourself for eternal life?* (Augustine, *Sermon* 359A.10; cited in A. A. Just, *ACCS*, p. 255)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

1. Why does the Master praise the unjust steward? How is this a “twist” in Jesus’ parable?

2. Who are the “sons of this world” and in what way are they wiser than the “sons of light”?

For Further Study

1. Arthur A. Just, Jr. *Luke*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament III. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003. Pp. 254-56