

LUKE – CHAPTER 16

PRAY

Spend a few moments together in prayer asking that you would be open to God's voice speaking through his Word today.

READ

Take time to read through Luke chapter 16

EXAMINE

This is quite a challenging chapter in Luke's gospel to understand. The parable of the shrewd manager is, at first, not easy to reconcile in the greater narrative of the gospel. It is important to keep in mind that the story follows on from other parables in chapter 14 and 15 that address social relationships, particularly between the rich and poor. The places of honour at the Pharisee's house were highly sort after by the guests (14:7). Then when the invitation goes out to the great banquet there is a social order that is followed in the invitation process. Those who accept the invitation are not the rich, though, but the poor. Finally, the older brother thought that the return of his prodigal brother should not warrant a party since he had dishonoured the family name (15:28-30). The somewhat complex social relationships are used by Jesus again and again to illustrate how life in the Kingdom of God will be different, especially for the poor.

1. In this parable Jesus introduces two main characters. The rich man and his manager. The rich man's wealth can be considered very large given the amounts owed to him by his debtors. The manager has a privileged position in his role of looking after his master's assets, making him a relatively wealthy and influential man as well. He heard that his master is not happy with his work and must decide how he will respond. He knows he will be fired, but it hasn't happened yet. What do you think are his options here?

He could do nothing and hope for mercy. He could squander the resources he has access to, but risk severe punishment from his master, possibly even death. Or he could act in a way that looks forward to his inevitable change in social status from "rich" to "poor," and set up relationships he can draw upon soon with people who will "owe" him in the near future.

2. We're briefly introduced to two "debtors." The manager comes to each one and asks them how much they owe (he really should know this information, but apparently he isn't doing his job very well!). The original amounts owed are very large. How do you think these debtors responded when their debts were reduced considerably?

We expect that they would have been fearful at first, but then grateful for relief from at least some of the debt they owed. No doubt they would have remembered the kindness of the manager into the future (this is the plan of the manager).

3. Read verses 8 again. Why did the master commend his manager, even though it cost him money?

The master can see how the manager has acted in such a way that he retains good relationships with the people around him. This is for the manager's benefit once he gets fired, but there are also some flow on benefits for the master (keeping his customer's happy, and he is also more likely to get some debt repaid if the total amount is reduced). This "shrewdness" in "dealing with their own kind" is what we might call "business savvy" in today's world. It is "winning friends and influencing people" even if the ethics are questionable.

4. Jesus lesson from this parable extends from verse 9 through to verse 13 so it's important keep those verses together (verse 9 on its own is difficult if taken in isolation). Jesus encourages us to "use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves." The use of worldly wealth, though, occurs within the context of serving God, not money. How does using worldly wealth for the purpose of relationships occur within the context of prioritising our service to God?

The shrewd manager understood how to influence people for his own benefit. The "shrewd" disciple will use worldly wealth for the sake of service to God, not self. Those who use wealth for their own purposes will benefit from it in this lifetime. Those who use wealth for the sake of the kingdom will "welcomed into eternal dwellings." In the larger context of Luke's gospel it is rich people's concern for, and priority towards, the poor that is crucial to keep in mind here.

5. Consider now the Pharisees' response (vs 14). We're told that they loved money and so the point of the story cuts them to the bone. Consider Jesus' response to them – "What people value highly is detestable in God's sight." (vs 15). What are the things that people value highly today that might be considered detestable in God's sight?

REFLECT

1. What is your relationship to "worldly wealth" like at the moment?
2. Do you love and serve God above money?
3. Would your bank statement and credit card bills agree with your answer to questions 1 and 2?

IMAGINE

1. List three things that have really stood out from this study.
2. Without worrying about any restrictions, what would the church look like if those things were always present? You might like to consider this from a global or local perspective (or both).

PERFORM

1. What action can you take today (taking account of real world restrictions) that is a step towards that dream becoming a reality?

PRAY

Spend time in prayer for each other, particularly for the actions you've committed to.

For next week....

1. Long Slow Read (LSR). Read chapter 17 slowly over the course of week. You can do this as many times as you like.
2. Tempo Read – Read and reread Chapter 17 several times. Take note of verses/phrases/characters that stand out – e.g. Jesus, Holy Spirit, poor, women.
3. Repeats – Choose one verse to memorise. Repeat it many times throughout the day and over the course of a week or so. Meditate on the verse and pray it in and out. Repeat the verse many times throughout your day.