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# The Dishonest Manager

Luke 16 v 1-14

## Introduction

How good are you at valuing something? Do you know the cost of the following items?

- A pint of milk - 50p
- A Mars Bar - 65p
- A DVD - £10
- A Kindle - £110
- A Gucci handbag - £800
- A Ford Focus - £17,000
- A Friend?

According to the British Household Panel a good friend is worth £85,000 per year. They found that a salary increase resulted in very little increase in happiness, but a friend made a huge difference to people's wellbeing.

In our scripture today, Jesus tells a parable, an interesting story relating the value of friends against the value of money.

## Summary

Let's go over the story. We have a rich man, who has a manager to deal with his accounts. Unfortunately the manager has been abusing the trust placed in him, and has been reported for it, so the rich man tells the manager he has lost his job. He is to get the accounts in order and leave.

We hear the manager's internal thoughts as he considers his position. He feels unable to do manual labour, and is too ashamed to beg, so he realises he needs help. He comes up with a plan. One by one he calls in his master's debtors, and he reduces their debt, by 50%, by 20% and so on. He doesn't gain any monetary value from this, but he does gain friends, who he can look to when he needs a roof over his head and a decent meal.

The boss's reaction to this is surprising. Despite the fact he has lost out he commends the manager for his shrewdness. Perhaps he sees something of himself in this man.

## **Context**

This seems an unusual parable. Usually Jesus gives us an example to follow, but this man seems to be a dishonest person, and not someone to follow. What are we supposed to do with the story?

It helps to see the context of the parable. Jesus has been meeting with tax collectors and sinners (ch 15 v 1) and the pharisees are not happy about this. They think these people are of less value than them, and in chapter 15 Jesus showed the value of people by explaining 3 times with 3 examples that there is great joy in heaven when a sinner repents. In chapter 16 he looks at what the Pharisees do value, and in verse 14 we learn they have a love of money. So we have a story here about the relative value of people verses money. The dishonest manager, despite being a man of the world, an unrighteous man, still saw a few things:

- Money was fleeting. It can disappear at any time
- Having friends was important
- Any way he could gain friends would benefit him in the long term

The Pharisees had a totally different outlook. For them:

- Money was their goal
- Status was more important than people
- The only friends they were interested in were friends in high places

## **Comment**

There has been a fair amount of debate over this parable, including whether the manager used his own commission to lower the debts, or effectively stole the master's money in doing so. I think it's unreasonable to think that he earned up to 50% commission on a loan so think he must be cheating his master to reduce these debts. Thankfully we don't have to ponder too much what Jesus wanted us to learn from the story, as he tells us in the subsequent verses.

### **1. Friends are more important than wealth (v9)**

The lightbulb moment for the manager was when he realised that his wealth was about to be taken away and he needed something more permanent. He needed good friends to be there for him in his time of need.

Jesus observes that this worldly man could see these things and yet the children of light were missing it. They were concerned about their wealth more than the condition of the people around them. He advises his disciples to use whatever they have to win over people. Invest in the gospel and use whatever God has given you to draw people to Christ. We can tell this advice is gospel focussed as Jesus says these new friends will welcome us into their eternal

dwellings. And they can only have eternal dwellings if they come into the kingdom of God themselves.

## **2. Trust and responsibility are given progressively (v10-12)**

Our natures are consistent, so if we're given a little and misuse it, we are likely to also misuse a large amount. However if we prove faithful with a little then God will increase what we have for the purposes of serving him more.

This flies in the face of the prosperity gospel, which teaches that God rewards those who are faithful with riches for themselves. Jesus notes that any riches we have are "unrighteous wealth" and to be used to further his kingdom.

## **3. We can't serve two masters (v13)**

Jesus puts it really simply: we can't serve both God and Mammon (money). If we love one, we will hate the other. Since v14 tells us that the Pharisees love money, it follows on that they must hate God. This was a real smack in the mouth for the Pharisees and it isn't long before they are plotting revenge.

Matthew 6 19-21,24 also quotes Jesus saying we cannot serve two masters. In this case there is no parable, but Jesus makes it clear that heavenly riches are more important than earthly ones. You see the comparison? He also says "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

## **How to Make Friends and Evangelise People**

### **1. Make friends with God**

Care about your future.

Jesus used another image when he said we shouldn't try to remove the mote from someone else's eye when there's a great big stick in our own. He didn't say not to help your friend but he said you deal with your own problem first. Then you'll be better able to help your friend. For the same reason in the safety talk on planes they say if the oxygen masks come down from overhead, put your own one on before you attempt to put your child into theirs.

Our safety and security is vitally important. God wants us to be close to him. But there's a huge barrier in the way - sin. And worse, there's nothing we can do about it. So God made a way. His Son came to earth and then went to the cross to crush that barrier, leaving the way open. If you're not secure in the knowledge of your destination then turn to Jesus, make friends with God through him.

## **2. Think highly of people**

Care about their future

What do we see as we encounter people in the street? Designer clothes or grubby clothes? Well groomed or windswept and interesting? Confident or shy? Do we put them on scales and weigh their worth?

What does God see? He sees beyond the surface. He sees a heart that is sinful, and yet he loves them. He sees the possibility of a wonderful transformation. He sees a soul heading for destruction and wants to turn it around. If you get to know them you can catch a glimpse beneath the surface and see the inner person

Look at what you have

How can you use it to draw people to Jesus?

Summary - worth - suitcase excess baggage