

Bennochy church 23rd October 2016

"The real measure of your wealth is how much you'd be worth if you lost all your money."

I am not sure how you responded to the passage from Luke 16, but for me my first reaction was, it sends out 'mixed messages'! Here is a dishonest man rewarded for using his initiative, but his motive, it is to protect himself, so that when he loses his job, and that is what was going to happen, he would have somewhere else to go.

He is given some time to get the accounts in order and he uses it wisely. He seeks to gain influence over the people who owe a debt to his master, although, actually he no longer has any authority to do so. These people are never going to be his friends, but they will owe him something, and maybe he'll get a job out of it, or since he has fiddled the books, and these so called friends are in on it, if the worst case scenario arises, he can black mail them!

He has one other ace up his sleeve, the outcome of his action would be seen as a benevolent act, not by him, but by his master. It would make his master look good in the eyes of others and it would make it that bit more difficult for his master to get rid of him.

This is man whose life is on the verge of falling apart, and he did not like the prospect of the kind of jobs he was he was going to have to do if he lost this one. So he is in survival mode. The bottom line is, he is doing this for personal gain and at the end of the day, his master praises him for his actions. We must assume he did not lose his job.

The passage then gets a bit messy. It is unclear exactly what conclusion Luke wishes to draw from this man's example. There are many possibilities. He first of all makes this statement, the people of the world, presumably, the people not of God, are more shrewd than the people of the light when it comes to business transactions. I am not sure if Luke is saying, this is a positive example to follow, or not? However, there is something hidden in this statement about being as ingenious in your attempt to live a good life, as these men sought to attain worldly wealth.

The words of Jesus then seem to add to the confusion. Make friends with worldly wealth, we can see the link with the story, but he then says, when the wealth runs out, as it will, you will be welcomed by God. Talk about drilling down to find meaning!

The best I can think of is, use wealth for the right reasons. Do this by helping others and you will attain the wealth of eternity.

So wealth is not what you keep, it is what you give away. Or to put it another way, the poor will be your advocate before God.

The next section contains some well known biblical principles, though I am not entirely convinced about the logic of them in this context. Be faithful in the small, so that you will be trusted by God in larger, eternal, matters, and remember, small dishonest actions can lead to larger ones. I think that is what Luke is trying to say. I may be wrong.

In verse 11 we land on safer ground. A link that understands the importance and distinction between what is false and real wealth. If you cannot be trusted with wealth that lasts only for a time, how can you be trusted with wealth that lasts for an eternity. I think we get that. Luke then tries to link us back to the original example of the shrewd manager. If we have not been faithful with what has been given to us by God, why should God, give to you, his eternal wealth. That is not what the passage actually says, but it is how I understand it.

I don't think these words are clear and in some respects they seem to be unconnected statements, on a similar theme, that have been linked together by the author of the gospel. Words of Jesus that Luke wants to use, and he has gathered them together under the theme of use of wealth.

Maybe the idea is, that the words of Jesus are being used as a counter to the actions of the shrewd manager. Maybe it is about

holly worldliness in the way we live our lives? In today's language, we would call it stewardship. How do we use the gifts of God given to us to advance the God's Kingdom in the world today. This passage is about money, but it could also be about the use of our time and talents.

It is about what we see as important in life. What are our priorities? We cannot serve two masters, slavery is exclusive, no time was theirs for anything or anyone else. You cannot be loyal to both, so which one do we serve? The wealth of the world or the wealth of God? The outcome of the passage is clear, but I am not convinced that the example given, is so clear cut.

Winston Churchill said, *"We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."*

The challenge for us is how to be the shrewd manager of our resources and use them for God. It is about recognising that no matter the size of our wealth, the principle of stewardship is exactly the same. We can only be responsible for what we have. To use it wisely, and recognise true wealth from God when we see it and when we have it.

So who comes out better in this passage, the shrewd manager or faithless disciple? I am not sure, and I will leave you to decide! The final words are Billy Graham's, *When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost.*