

Ordinary 25C - 2025

There is another take on this parable which suggests that when we focus on the steward, we may miss the point of the parable. Jesus often tells parables with this kind of misdirection...or at least, those who gave titles to the parables get taken in by the misdirection. For instance, the prodigal son is probably more about the prodigal father whose love and grace is boundless (and spendthrift). Interestingly, this parable begins with some of the same language as the prodigal son; the rich man hears that his steward has been squandering his property; squandering is the same word used to describe the younger son's spending.

The original audience would have identified with the steward and the rich man would be considered the villain especially in the implication that he "hears" about his steward's behavior could mean he is an absentee landlord (especially disliked in the 1st c. Israel). Further the master accuses the steward on hearsay evidence and even though he calls for an accounting, he says he will still fire the steward. Original audience would boo the rich man.

The steward writes off far more on the bills than would cover his commission, but probably would cover the interest on the loan. Keep in mind that usury is prohibited by the Torah but the interest on loans could be considered handling charges and such, so it would not be considered usury per se... though everyone knew it really was. So when the steward devises his scheme, he takes off the interest and perhaps a bit of the principle; now, in 1st c. Israel the steward would be considered an agent of his master and as an agent it is assumed that his actions are endorsed and approved by the master. Therefore, when the steward dismisses the interest, he restores face to his master (who had lost it over his (the steward's) scandalous behavior). When the steward dismisses the interest, he implies that his master is generous and acting faithfully to the Torah (most important). No wonder the master has to admire the steward at the end of the story because it ends up as a win-win situation.

If the parable is a metaphor of the kingdom, then initially we should not identify with the steward but the master. As Paul points out to the Corinthians, the world considers the kingdom as a scandal especially in regard to the cross. The world rejects the kingdom on this hearsay evidence and has lost honor. Yet the kingdom does not act in revenge or in getting even at the accusation of scandal, but instead, the kingdom works to restore face so that we may be saved. As we become members of the Kingdom, then we can carry on the activity of the kingdom--in spite of the scandal of the cross--as stewards to the world.

Adversity

The story is told of the man whose son complained about the terrible circumstances he was facing. The boy said he didn't know how to cope with the adversity of his life.

The father took his son into the kitchen and had him put water in three pots. He had the boy put a carrot in one, an egg in another, and coffee beans in the third. Then they put the pots on the stove, turned on the heat until the water boiled for several minutes in each pot. They then turned

off the burners and, using a pair of kitchen tongs, removed the carrot and the egg from their pots, and poured the contents of the third through a strainer into a cup. The dad asked the boy what happened to each. In the first pot, the carrot had become soft; in the second, the egg had become hard, and in the third, the water had changed to coffee.

"The lesson," said the father, "is this: adversity can make you soft by weakening your resolve and sapping your strength; or adversity can make you hard, by making you bitter or mean; or you can change the water of adversity into the coffee of opportunity."

Looking Past Oneself

An enormously rich man complained to a psychiatrist that despite his great wealth which enabled him to have whatever he wanted, he still felt miserable. The psychiatrist took the man to the window overlooking the street and asked, "What do you see?" The man replied, "I see men, women, and children."

The psychiatrist then took the man to stand in front of mirror and asked, "Now what do you see?" The man said, "I see only myself." The psychiatrist then said, "In the window there is a glass and in the mirror there is glass, and when you look through the glass of the window, you see others, but when you look into the glass of the mirror you see only yourself. The reason for this," said the psychiatrist, "is that behind the glass in the mirror is a layer of silver. When silver is added, you cease to see others. You only see yourself."

Whenever your devotion to money and material things causes you to be self-centered, you in essence deny God's intention for your life. It is also a denial of the Christ, for Jesus came into the world so that we might be in union with God.

(by Maxie Dunnam from *Turn in an Account of Your Stewardship*)

God's Grace

The grace of God is like the man who went into the clothing store to buy a suit and was shown a blue one. "No," the customer said, "That won't do. I want a green suit." So, the clerk called out to his partner, "Turn on the green light, Joe, the man wants a green suit!"

It is not that things are changed. But we see them differently. In Christ we are given spectacles which give us a kingdom perspective. We see ourselves in a heavenly light; through God's eyes.

We see how things really are. We need no longer suffer from the stigma that "sinner" - forgiven or otherwise - denotes. We can see ourselves as "heirs" with Christ of the Divine inheritance. The world is not changed, but we see it and ourselves in a new light; a kingdom light.

(by Robert McClelland from *Fire in the Hole*, CSS Publishing Company)