

## Session 7

May 26, 2019

### “EXPLOIT YOUR FRIENDS”

#### Luke 16:1-12

Of all the parables of Jesus, this one in Luke 16 is probably the most confounding. First, we know that parables are *earthly stories with spiritual applications*. So, the object of parables in general is to teach kingdom principles in easy-to-understand stories. This story is far from easy to understand! Second, the parables of Jesus tend to have clear-cut good guys and bad guys. This one has no role model to follow in the traditional sense, as all the characters are rotten. So what is going on here?

Once again, the context of this story is a key factor in understanding it. In general, the context involves misplaced love of riches and earthly possessions (see the remainder of the chapter). There are three parts in this initial drama.

**The story is told (vv. 1-7).** Basically, Jesus tells the parable of an incompetent and/or dishonest steward who was squandering the money he was managing. His boss, the investor, confronted him with his negligence and fired him (v. 2). The steward quickly weighed his options. He was certainly not willing to do manual labor, and he was far too proud to beg (v. 3). So before turning in his keys, he made one final decision; not to save his job, but rather to secure his future (v. 4). So he went to the people who owed his boss money and quickly cut a deal with each, dramatically reducing their debt. How this was done is not clear. It is unlikely that he swindled more from his boss, and more likely that he either cut out his own commission or made up the difference out of his own pocket. In any case, the debtors were thrilled to receive a discount, insuring they would “welcome him into their homes” when he lost his job and became destitute (v. 4).

**The story concludes (vv. 8-9).** As Jesus concludes the parable, the story takes an unexpected twist. The angry master does not hire the money manager back, but he does praise him for being so shrewd in buttering up his clients to set up his future. The end of verse 8 is key: “For the sons of this age are more astute than the sons of light in dealing with their own people.” The Lord is not at all commending the dishonesty of the worldly money handlers, but He is suggesting that their strong commitment to reap profits in their earthly realm far outshines the believer’s commitment to reap heavenly riches in the spiritual realm. Accordingly, Jesus does not suggest that His disciples use unrighteous money to exploit their friends (v. 9). Rather He urged them to use what earthly possessions they did have to advance His kingdom, so that when those earthly possessions failed (as they surely would), they would have heavenly riches instead (see Matt. 6:19-21).

**The story is applied (vv. 9-12).** These final applications begin with a general principle: followers of Christ must be consistent and trustworthy in how they handle their possessions. The apostle Paul said, “Now it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). Jesus said that those who are trustworthy when handling a little will be trustworthy when handling a lot. And those who are not trustworthy with a little are certainly not worthy of handling a lot (v. 10). The general principle is then narrowed to a more specific application. If Christ-followers show themselves to be unrighteous in handling earthly possessions, who would trust them when

they are presenting heavenly treasures? (v. 11) And if believers cannot be trusted with earthly things which are temporary and not truly ours to begin with, why would anyone (including God), give us charge of kingdom treasures?