

Exegetical Study on the Parable of the Unjust Steward

Chapter 4.6 – Verse 9: Application to Disciples

“And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they may welcome you into the eternal dwellings.” This verse functions as Jesus’ direct application of the parable. Up to this point, listeners might still wonder what the story of the steward has to do with discipleship. Verse 9 brings the lesson into sharp relief: like the steward, disciples must use their present opportunities wisely, with a view to the future. The twist is that Jesus lifts the steward’s shrewdness out of its morally compromised setting and reframes it in terms of generosity, hospitality, and eternal reward. The expression “wealth of unrighteousness” (often translated “unrighteous mammon”) has sparked much debate. Does Jesus mean wealth acquired unjustly, or does he mean wealth in general? The broader context suggests the latter. For Luke, money itself is compromised simply by belonging to this age. It is subject to corruption, often intertwined with exploitation, and easily becomes an idol. Wealth is called “unrighteous” not because every coin is stolen, but because in a fallen world money is never neutral. This perspective echoes Luke’s consistent suspicion of riches. The rich man in 12:16–21 perishes a fool because he hoarded wealth for himself. In 18:18–23, a ruler walks away from Jesus sorrowful because his riches possess him. Zacchaeus, by contrast, demonstrates true repentance by giving half of his goods to the poor and repaying fourfold anyone he had defrauded (19:1–10). In each case, the test of discipleship is the use of possessions. Thus, “wealth of unrighteousness” signals the morally dangerous nature of money. Yet Jesus does not call for its rejection. Instead, he insists it be redirected toward purposes that align with the kingdom. The steward in the parable used debt reductions to create a network of obligated friends who would welcome him once unemployed. Jesus takes this principle and transforms it: disciples are to use wealth to make “friends” through acts of mercy and generosity. These friends are not accomplices in fraud, but the poor, the needy, and fellow believers whose lives are sustained and dignified through sharing. The Lukan concern for hospitality and solidarity runs throughout the Gospel. In 14:12–14, Jesus urges hosts not to invite the wealthy who can repay them, but the poor and disabled who cannot, promising that such hospitality will be repaid at the resurrection. Similarly, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31) illustrates the eternal consequences of neglecting generosity. The rich man, who ignored Lazarus at his gate, finds himself tormented in Hades, while Lazarus is comforted. “Making friends” therefore refers to building bonds of compassion that will endure into eternity. The beneficiaries of generosity may one day testify to a disciple’s faithfulness. The image is relational, not transactional: eternal life is not purchased, but acts of mercy are evidence of allegiance to God rather than Mammon. Jesus adds a sober reminder: wealth will fail. Whether through economic collapse, death, or divine judgment, possessions are temporary. To build one’s security on wealth is folly, for it cannot accompany anyone beyond the grave. This echoes Luke 12:33–34, where Jesus commands disciples to sell their possessions and give to the poor, storing treasure in heaven “where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.” The inevitability of wealth’s failure heightens the urgency of the command. If money is passing away, its only wise use is to invest it in relationships and acts of mercy that outlast it. Every possession becomes an opportunity to anticipate its eventual loss by transforming it into something of eternal value. The contrast with earthly homes is striking. The steward hoped to be welcomed into the houses of debtors. Disciples are promised a welcome into “eternal dwellings.” The term evokes security, stability, and divine hospitality. Unlike the fragile patronage networks of this age, the kingdom of God offers everlasting welcome. This eschatological horizon gives money its proper place. Wealth cannot provide ultimate security, but generosity with wealth can contribute to eternal joy. The irony is sharp: the very thing that tempts people to idolatry—Mammon—can, if redirected, become

the instrument of eternal blessing. Jesus' teaching shows that money is not only an economic issue but a spiritual one. How disciples handle possessions reveals their true master. To hoard is to serve Mammon; to give is to serve God. Acts of mercy and hospitality are not wasted. They echo into eternity. By using wealth to meet needs now, disciples store up treasure where it cannot be lost. The steward recognized that his future depended not on accounts but on relationships. Jesus applies this principle at a higher level: in God's kingdom, people matter more than possessions. Investments in relationships of love and mercy endure when wealth fails. This verse challenges disciples to think creatively and urgently about their resources. Instead of clinging to possessions, they are to deploy them strategically for the sake of others. Practical applications might include supporting the poor, funding mission, practicing hospitality, or using one's home and income for communal good. The question becomes not "How much can I keep?" but "How much can I convert into eternal treasure by using it for others?" The call is radical: every expenditure becomes a decision about loyalty to God or Mammon. The steward used dishonesty to secure temporal housing. Disciples are to use generosity to secure eternal dwelling. Both display foresight, but the goals and means differ. The world often excels in shrewdness but misdirects it. Believers are called to equal or greater shrewdness, directed toward love and eternal purposes. Verse 9 delivers the heart of Jesus' application. Wealth is fleeting, tainted, and dangerous, yet it can become a tool for eternal good. The steward's example demonstrates foresight; Jesus' command transforms it into a call for generosity. Disciples must use their possessions now to build relationships that will last beyond death. When wealth fails, as it surely will, such friendships will testify to their faithfulness, and they will be welcomed into the eternal dwellings prepared by God. The challenge is sharp: what am I doing with the resources entrusted to me? Am I clinging to Mammon, or am I using wealth to make friends for eternity? Jesus' words leave no room for neutrality.