

Sermon Sunday 12/3/23

Romans 12: 1 – 12 and Luke 16: 1 – 8

Parable The unjust steward

Continuing our series of sermons on the parables Julian a writer in the 4th century wrote that this parable taught Jesus' followers to be liars and thieves and that noble romans should reject all such corrupting influences. It is a parable avoided by preachers, theologians I read who avoid it like the plague. Not a good start.

However, to look at this parable we must compare it with the preceding parable of the prodigal son, in Chapter 15; there are significant parallels in both parables

1. Each has a noble master who shows grace to a wayward person.
2. Both contain an ungrateful son and steward who waste the master's resources or cause losses.
3. In both cases the son/steward reach a moment of truth regarding such things.
4. They both throw themselves on the mercy of the master and
5. Both parables deal with broken trust and all the problems which arise from it.

The steward is told by his master to give an account of his management as he cannot manager anymore; the master had obviously heard stories about the steward and was going to sack him. These reports would have come from people who respected the master and whom the master trusted, so he needed to investigate. Having been told to hand over his accounts the steward panicked. Verse 3 I am too old to dig, ashamed to beg. I know what I will do so that when I lose my job people will welcome me into their houses and businesses.

He tells his masters debtors to alter their bills by lowering the amounts owed, which was and still is fraud and theft. By doing this the steward knows he will be welcomed by the people as a shrewd person who they could employ but I suspect because of what he had done to get this he

would be closely watched and not trusted. However, they were happy, their debts had been reduced.

The master as a noble person would have heard of all this from people on his estate and would not have wanted to upset the joy of his people by the reduction in debt so he forgave the steward but still sacked him for his illegal dealings.

So, is this about teaching cheating and lying, No look at verse 9 'I TELL YOU, USE WORDLY WEALTH TO GAIN FRIENDS FOR YOURSELVES SO THAT WHEN IT IS GONE YOU WILL BE WELCOMED INTO ETERNAL/heavenly DWELLINGS.' We must make good use of our financial resources, not to try to buy our way into heaven but to use them to help others and help them to find 'eternal dwellings – heaven. If we use our money to help those in need or help others find Christ our earthly investment will bring eternal benefit; all we are doing is loving our neighbour and when we obey God's will the unselfish use of wealth and possessions will follow.

Yes, the steward was wrong; however, God, like the forgiving master, forgives. The nature of God is a God of justice, mercy and integrity or honour. Justice leads to the dismissal of the steward but not slavery or imprisonment as it could have been. This shows mercy always used by God and the integrity is the community's high regard for God, like the master.

So Julian was wrong. The parable using the benefit the poor people will receive because of the stewards actions and the forgiveness shown by the master certainly teaches me that our sins will always be found out yet we can seek forgiveness from God through His Son Jesus Christ, not by theft or fraud or lying, but by seeking forgiveness and using the resources we have as individuals or as a Church, for example money, time, listening and teaching to name but a few in the service of God to help others and to love our neighbour. Amen

