



Biblical Heritage Center's

# ***DISCOVERING THE BIBLE***

*Viewing the words of the Bible through the eyes of their ancient authors  
to hear their messages and learn from their experiences.*

MARCH • 2018

## **The Unrighteous Manager**

*By Jim Myers*

No parable raises more ethical and moral questions than the parable that is traditionally known as *ó The Parable of the Unjust Steward*. It is recorded in *Luke 16*. As you read the translation below (*New King James Version*), put yourself in the shoes of each of characters and view the events through their eyes. Was Jesus suggesting that his followers act like the steward in real life situations?

<sup>1</sup> He also said to His disciples: *ó*There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. <sup>2</sup> So he called him and said to him, *¿*What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.*ø*

<sup>3</sup> *ó*Then the steward said within himself, *¿*What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup> I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.*ø*

<sup>5</sup> *ó*So he called every one of his master's debtors to *him*, and said to the first, *¿*How much do you owe my master?*ø* <sup>6</sup> And he said, *¿*A hundred measures of oil.*ø* So he said to him, *¿*Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.*ø*

<sup>7</sup> Then he said to another, *¿*And how much do you owe?*ø* So he said, *¿*A hundred measures of wheat.*ø* And he said to him, *¿*Take your bill, and write eighty.*ø* <sup>8</sup> So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

<sup>9</sup> *ó*And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. <sup>10</sup> He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much.

<sup>11</sup> Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

We created guidelines to help you more accurately understand what the words of Jesus meant to him. In the case of this parable, they help us make sense of words that has stumped many Bible readers.

### **Guideline #1**

*Jesus never intended for people to take all of his words literally.*

For some, this guideline creates a real challenge because of their *óbeliefs about the Bible.ö* I understand because I was raised in a church that taught *óthe Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God and that the words of the Bible are to be taken literally.ö* It was a *ódogmaö* in our church.

*A dogma is an established belief or doctrine held by a religion or ideology that is authoritative and not to be disputed, doubted, or diverged from.*

There is a big difference between a *belief* and a *dogma*. I clearly understood what my church taught about the Bible *was not to be disputed, doubted or diverged from* *and definitely not questioned!* Today I know that this dogma kept us from accurately understanding many of the messages of the Bible, including the teachings of Jesus.

Parables are often characterized by an intended incongruity between the moral approach contained in the parable itself and the message it is designed to deliver. They also contain statements that are designed to heighten the shock value in order to get the audience's attention *ó words never intended to be taken literally.*<sup>1</sup> Below are two examples Jesus used to grab the attention of the audience.

*“ . . . whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of being tried in Bet Din (a court in the Jewish justice system).”<sup>2</sup>*

*“ . . . whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you . . .”<sup>3</sup>*

Make it a habit to look for intended incongruities in the parables and identify statements that are clearly used for their shock value.

---

### **Guideline #2**

*Many of the things Jesus taught are related to conflicts between Jewish sects.*

The *Synoptic Gospels* (Matthew, Mark and Luke) record a number of encounters between Jesus and members of other Jewish sects *ó Pharisees and Sadducees specifically*. Sometimes Jesus taught things that agreed with one and not the other, while other times he disagreed with both. It is important to learn about the teachings of above sects, as well as other groups *ó priests, scribes, Zealots and Essenes*.

---

### **Guideline #3**

*View the words in their immediate contexts.*

*Context is defined as that which precedes and/or follows any part of a discourse and can throw light on the meanings of the Source's message.* When a word, sentence or paragraph is removed from its contextual environment the original meaning can be completely lost and a new unrelated meaning substituted in its place.

---

### **Guideline #4**

*Identify technical terms.*

*A technical term is word or phrase that has a very specialized meaning to a specific group that differs from the literal meanings of the word or words of the phrase.* In theological circles, the meanings of technical terms may differ between religious groups.

You may have noticed that I substituted the word *ōmanagerō* for *ōstewardō* in the title of this article. I did it because *ōstewardō* is a word that most people today rarely -- *if ever* -- use in their normal conversations. Some younger Bible readers have never used it, so I wanted to use a word they understand. Now with the above guidelines in mind, let's take another look at this parable of Jesus.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus said to **his disciples**: "There was a certain rich man who had a **manager**, and a complaint was brought to him that this man was **wasting** his goods."*

Jesus was speaking to his disciples, not strangers. They had a relationship with Jesus, were members of his movement and had a knowledge base founded on previous teachings. They were familiar with the teaching techniques he used and had the advantage of being able to watch his facial expressions and hear the tone of his voice as he spoke Hebrew words. We are in a very different environment when we read English translations of Greek manuscripts that were made centuries after he taught.

The disciples recognized key words and phrases that were technical terms (Guideline #4) or links to other things Jesus had taught before. In this case, the word *ōwastingō* would have caught their attention. They had heard it in another parable ó *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*. In the context (Guideline #3) of the parable we are studying, Luke placed the parable of the Prodigal Son immediately before (*Luke 15:13*) this parable.

*And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there **wasted** his possessions with prodigal living.*

By the way, when was the last time you used the word *ōprodigalō* in a conversation. Prodigal means *ōspending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant.ö*<sup>4</sup> Both parables are about men that wasted money and legal relationships with the person that was the source of the money ó *father/son* and *owner/manager*. The manager wasted his owner's money; while the son wasted the money he inherited from his father (who also appears to be a rich man). There are also some important differences between the son and manager:

- (1) *The son was the legal owner of the money he is wasting.*
- (2) *His father was unaware of what his son was doing with the money.*
- (3) *The manager wasn't the legal owner of the money he is wasting.*
- (4) *The owner received a complaint about what the manager was doing with his money.*

---

<sup>2</sup> *So the rich man called the manager and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management. You can no longer be the manager.'*

Put yourself in the manager's shoes. The boss calls for you to come and meet with him. You walk in and you hear those words. (*I think Jesus intentionally took a long pause after each sentence.*) So pause after you read each sentence and consider what could have gone through the manager's mind at that moment. Do you feel the tension rising as you move from one sentence to the next?

- (1) *What is this I hear about you?*
- (2) *Give an account of your management.*
- (3) *You can no longer be manager.*

---

<sup>3</sup> *“The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do? My boss is taking the management position away from me. I cannot dig. I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup> I know what to do, so that when I am put out of the manager position they will welcome me into their houses.’*

Anytime the Bible reveals what someone is thinking, pay close attention. Now consider the progression of the thoughts that were popping up in the manager’s mind and how they are related to the shock of being fired.

- *What shall I do?*
- *My boss is taking my job away from me.*
- *I cannot dig.*
- *I am ashamed to beg.*

Sound familiar? That’s what our minds do when unexpected things happen, especially when it involves the loss of security and money. It’s called going into *survival mode*. As the manager’s mind was jumping around searching for options about what to do next, he had an *“Aha Moment!”*

*I know what to do to get **them** to welcome me **in their houses** after I am fired.*

What the heck is he talking about? Who are the *“them”*? By the way, did you notice that the manager doesn’t appear to feel any shame or guilt? Clearly, the only thing of the manager’s mind is himself. However, Jesus has planted a very important question in the minds of his disciples (students) *“Who is going to welcome the unemployed manager into their houses?”*

---

<sup>5</sup> *The manager called every one of his boss’ debtors to him.*

*He said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ <sup>6</sup> He said to him, ‘A hundred measures of olive oil.’ The manager said, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly and write fifty.’*

<sup>7</sup> *Then he said to another man, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ And the manager said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’*

The boss had called the manager to come to him, now the manager calls people that owe his boss money to come to him. You probably noticed that he didn’t mention the conversation he had with the boss with them. Pay close attention to what the manager says and consider what he does and does not do.

## Rediscovering the Teachings of the Jesus of History

Jesus' teachings have the power to transform lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century just as much as they did in the 1<sup>st</sup> century *ó and they may be needed today even more!*

Over the past 1,900 years Christian Belief Systems have evolved and each step in that evolutionary process has taken new generations of Christians farther away from the teachings of Yeshua, the Jesus of history, and divided Christians from each other.

The arguments over man-made Christological/ theological beliefs, creeds, doctrines and dogmas are just as harmful and potentially deadly today as many have proven to be in persecutions, crusades and inquisitions of the pasts. The Jesus of history highest priority was how people responded to the needs of their fellow humans *ó not believing some person's version of "right" beliefs about him.*

Viewing the teachings of Jesus in their original cultural and linguistic contexts of the first century provides a much more accurate understanding of what he taught and how he understood his movement. His message is about God's will being done on earth now. It was not about spending a lifetime *öliving to die.ö* As a matter of fact, his salvation message (Matthew 25:31-46) is very clear *ó those who did acts of righteousness (feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, visiting the sick, etc.) enter eternal life.*

He never taught *öadmission to heaven is based on membership in a church or praying a prayer to be saved.ö* What are you basing your view of the afterlife on *ó the teaching of the **Real Yeshua** (the Jesus of history) or someone's **Theological Jesus** (a creation of their belief system)?*

Share this information with others. Have conversations. Ask questions. Track the history of your beliefs about Jesus and identify their sources and time periods. That's the least the Real Yeshua, the Jesus of history, would expect people using his name to do.

Help us provide more information about the life and teachings of the Jesus of history by making a donation today. Go to our website *ó <http://biblicalheritage.org> and click on *öDonateö* or mail your tax-deductible donation to the address at the bottom of the page.*

*Shalom!*

The manager tells the first man -- *“Take your bill, sit down quickly and write.”*

He told the second man -- *“Take your bill and write.”*

He gave the first person a much better deal (*lower amount you owe by 50%*) than the second person (*lower amount you owe by 20%*).

What do you think the two men thought about the deal the manager offered them?

Did you notice that the manager did not touch the bill or write anything?

---

<sup>8a</sup> *The master praised the unrighteous manager because he had dealt **cleverly** . . .*

Has the owner lost his mind! That’s not the way most owners would react to an employee that did something like that. This is clearly a statement that was clearly designed to shock readers (Guideline #1). It also contains an important technical term (Guideline #4) *ó cleverly*.

In Jesus’s Jewish culture, being *clever* was a very important skill to learn. It has a long a long history that stretches all the way back to the *Garden in Eden*. The author of the *Genesis* account set the stage for the famous scene of Adam and Eve encountering the serpent.

*The man and woman were clever and had not been shamed.  
The serpent was the most clever of all the wild animals.*<sup>5</sup>

The question this raised in the minds of his ancient audience was this -- *Which will be the cleverest; the two humans acting together or a wild animal acting alone?* As we all know, the serpent won! The story in *Genesis* taught an important lesson that Jesus also taught *ó always be the cleverest one in your dealings with others*. Jesus clearly made sure his students understood it before he sent them out to teach others (Matthew 10:16):

*“Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves;  
so **be clever as serpents** and innocent as doves.”*

---

Now let’s return to the parable.

<sup>8b</sup> . . . for the **sons of this world** are more clever in their generation than the **sons of light**.

<sup>9</sup> I say to you, “Make friends for yourselves from **unrighteous mammon**, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwelling places.”

Before the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* this parable was a kind of obscure puzzle, but now we are in a much better position to make sense Jesus’s words. Jesus used three *technical terms* (Guideline #4) that link it to the specific *sect* (Guideline #2) that Jesus was addressing. The technical terms Jesus used are *sons of this world*, *sons of light* and *unrighteous mammon*. The information from the *Dead Sea Scrolls* wasn’t available to public until the 1990s when control of the scrolls was wrestled from the grip of a small group of scholars that had controlled access to them since they were first discovered in 1946. The scrolls revealed the following meanings of the technical terms:

- *sons of light* -- the favorite self-designation members of the Essenes used to refer to themselves.<sup>6</sup>
- *sons of the world* ó one of the terms Essenes used to refer to outsiders, along with *sons of perdition, men of deceit, sons of darkness, etc.*<sup>7</sup>
- *unrighteous mammon* -- the wealth of those who did not belong to their exclusive sect.<sup>8</sup>

The scrolls also revealed some important things about how members of the Essenes viewed and were taught to interact with outsiders.

- (1) *No member shall be united with the foreigner in his work or in his wealth . . . except by payment.*<sup>9</sup>
- (2) *No man of the covenant of God (sons of light) shall trade with the sons of perdition except for cash.*<sup>10</sup>
- (3) *The wealth belonging to men of holiness (sons of light) shall not be mingled with the wealth belonging to men of deceit.*<sup>11</sup>
- (4) *Hate all the sons of darkness each according to his guilt in the vengeance of God.*<sup>12</sup>

Notice that members were barred from receiving money from outsiders. They believed God divided mankind into two groups ó *them and everyone else* – the outsiders are the condemned, wicked and sinful *sons of darkness*. Thus the Essenes separated themselves as far as possible from those outside their community, but not completely from the unrighteous mammon of the sons of darkness. This extreme separatism was also rooted in the ritual purity aspects of their daily life along with their beliefs about what would happen in the future.

- (1) *They were sure the day would come when they would conquer the whole world.*
- (2) *The date of this war had been preordained by God but had not yet arrived.*

Knowing that they were preordained to win the war, they were willing to suffer peacefully during the interim in the present wicked, social and political order. They were taught to do the following:

- (1) *Not return evil to anybody, with good pursue man, for with God rests the judgment of every living being, and he is the one to repay man for his deeds.*
- (2) *Show no jealousy with the spirit of evil towards others.*
- (3) *Not to covet the wealth of unrighteousness and the strife of men of perdition, but turn not your anger away from the men of iniquity and be not content until God establishes judgment.*
- (4) *Behave passively, peacefully and even benevolently towards the sons of darkness and keep your hatred against the sons of perdition a secret in the meantime.*
- (5) *The wicked priest robbed and amassed the wealth of men of unrighteousness.*<sup>13</sup>

Jesus knew something else about the Essenes:

(1) *Two things were left to individual discretion -- rendering of assistance and acts of compassion.*

(2) *Individuals could help the deserving when in need and supply food to the destitute.*<sup>14</sup>

On this point, Jesus and members of the other Jewish sects, including the Essenes agreed *ó it was God's will to do acts of almsgiving (acts of righteousness)*. In the parables, when references are made to a king (landlord, rich man, etc.) and obligations that others have to him, that person always represents God. The obligation *ó* or debt in this case -- *cannot refer to anything other than human obligations to God.*<sup>15</sup> So what point did Jesus want to make in this teaching? From Jesus' point of view, all humans have this obligation to God -- love Him with all of their hearts, souls and minds *ó and the only way to fulfill that obligation is by loving their neighbors as themselves*. This is the point Jesus made in this parable to the Essenes:

*Be clever like sons of the world! Use unrighteous mammon -- which ultimately belongs to God -- to do acts of almsgiving to make new friends of outsiders. They are also made in the image of God and some day they may open their eternal homes to receive you -- and God will praise the cleverness of your actions.*

He made a very similar point to the Pharisees. They were not a mutually exclusive group like the Essenes and did not physically separate themselves from everyone else. But they claimed their interpretations of the sacred writings were superior to those of others and looked down on them. In Matthew 5:20 Jesus made it clear to his followers that there was something that was much more important to God than *studying the Scriptures and interpreting verses correctly*:

*Unless your acts of righteousness (almsgiving) exceeds the acts of righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of God.*

And Jesus also taught something even more radical about the fate of the Gentiles on the *Great Day of Judgment*, when the people of all of the nations of the earth are judged. In Matthew 25:26 we read:

*And these (the unrighteous) will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.*

*The righteous did acts of almsgiving, the unrighteous did not.* As time passed and the Jesus movement evolved into a religion called *Christianity*, the focus changed from *doing what Jesus taught to beliefs about Jesus* -- that were created centuries later by people from other cultures. What would happen today if Christians -- *or anyone that values the teachings of Jesus* -- did what he taught *ó regardless of beliefs about an afterlife* -- wouldn't the world be a much safer, healthier and better place? **BHC**

#### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* By David Flusser © 1988 Magnes Press, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel; p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:22

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:28

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prodigal>

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 2:25-3:1a

<sup>6</sup> *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*; p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> 1QS 5:14-20; Damascus Document 13:14-16; 1QS 1:10-11

<sup>8</sup> *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*; p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> 1QS 5:14-20

<sup>10</sup> Damascus Document 13:14-16

<sup>11</sup> 1QS 9:8-10

<sup>12</sup> 1QS 1:10-11

<sup>13</sup> Commentary to Habakkuk 8:11

<sup>14</sup> *Josephus, Jewish War II, 134*

<sup>15</sup> *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*; p. 156.

## March Memorials

*In Loving Memory*

**DOVA IDA  
GREGORY**

b. March 14, 1907  
d. March 7, 1997

*May you dwell under His wings  
in complete SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**MINNIE  
KRAUTH**

d. March 22, 1998

*May you dwell under His wings  
in complete SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**JOHN P.  
GARGIULO**

d. March 15, 2015

*May you dwell under His wings  
in complete SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**ROBERT  
DEAN**

d. March 22, 1996

*May you dwell under His wings  
in complete SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**JOHN W.  
"JACK" NELSON**

b. October 25, 1932  
d. March 21, 2008

*May you dwell under His wings  
in complete SHALOM forever!*

*May their memories  
continue to bless those  
whose lives they touched.*

## In Their Remembrance

*May their memories inspire us to seek those qualities of mind and heart,  
which they shared when we walked life's journey together.*

*May we help to bring closer to fulfillment their highest ideals and noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our loyalty to those things which we valued and shared -  
faith, love, peace and devotion.*

*As long as we live, they too will live;  
for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.*

(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor Reflections - The New Mahzor - The Prayer Book Press)