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# **Acting now in light of the future**

## **A cost benefit analysis of following Jesus:**

### **What does Jesus require of me? Is it worth it?**

#### **- Session 6**

*Understanding that following Jesus requires the disciple to act now in light of the future – the future being heaven. For disciples there will be accountability for how they have acted now in this world. From Luke 16:1-15.*

### **The words of Jesus**

#### **Luke 16:1-15**

*1 Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2 So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'*

*3 "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg— 4 I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' 5 "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'*

*6 "Nine hundred gallons<sup>(a)</sup> of olive oil,' he replied.*

*"The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.'*

*7 "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'*

*"A thousand bushels<sup>(b)</sup> of wheat,' he replied.*

*"He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'*

*8 "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. 10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? 13 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."*

*14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. 15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight."*

Footnotes:

(a) Luke 16:6 Or about 3,000 liters

(b) Luke 16:7 Or about 30 tons

This is one of Jesus' most intriguing parables because he uses a dishonest man to teach a point.

You would expect the rich man to be rightly displeased by his manager's actions. After all, the manager's actions in the writing down of what is owed will cost the rich man a fortune. But that is not the reaction of the rich man in the parable.

**Q1. Why does the rich man commend the dishonest manager? (verse 8)**

The manager sees the future ahead – he is losing his job. He is too grand to beg and too soft to dig. So to ensure some kind of future, he writes down what is owed to his master to buy friends. The word “shrewd” usually means to be astute or sharp. It can be understood negatively. But here, the dishonest manager is commended for it – he has been shrewd in seeing the future and acting now.

**Q2. How does Jesus apply the point of the parable to his followers in verses 8-9?**

Jesus wants his disciples to be shrewd in the sense of seeing the future and acting now. If the future is heaven, then being shrewd is helping others to get there (they are the ones who will welcome the disciple). Jesus says that “people of the world” (the average unbeliever) are much better than “people of the light” (his followers) in being shrewd. The average unbeliever is good at seeing the future they want in this life and acting now so that they can be comfortable. They are shrewd in dealing with their own kind in the sense of making friends to help them achieve their goals. The disciples by contrast are not so good in the way being shrewd really matters – seeing heaven as the future and acting now.

**Q3. “You can see what people are passionate about by looking at their credit card statements”. Do you agree?**

What we are prepared to actually spend money on is in some ways an indicator of what we really care about. What would people conclude about you if they didn't know you but just had your credit card statements? If you are a follower of Jesus then would God see any evidence of that in the way you spend your money? If you're thinking about becoming a follower of Jesus then this will even impact your wallet.

**Q4. If someone said to Jesus “It's my money because I've earned it and therefore I am free to spend it the way that I want” – how would Jesus reply based on verses 10-12?**

In light of the parable, and what is made explicit in verse 12, the “little” you have now, the “worldly wealth” isn't yours but it's been given to you (by God). So your money is not yours to do with as you wish. God will hold you accountable for how you have used your money – he'll look over the credit card statements (so to speak). For his followers he is not saying: “spend wisely and get a big payout in heaven”. He's saying be trustworthy with what you have and the implication of the “reward” that you will get will be the reward of others being in heaven with you.

**Q5. Why can't we serve God and money? (verse 13)**

Money is only a currency in this world. So to serve money is to pursue comfort in this world. To serve God is to care about eternal things. The unbeliever sees the future and acts now, but it is about pursuing comfort in this life now, which is effectively serving money. The believer should see the real future (heaven – according to Jesus) and act now, which is serving God.

**Q6. How we spend our money now really does depend on the future we see. How do we know heaven is really there and is worth making sacrifices for?**

People have near-death experiences and talk about life after death etc but how do we know what they are saying is true? There is objective evidence for the resurrected Jesus recorded for us in the Bible. It is rational to believe the accounts of reliable eyewitnesses. If Jesus really did die and rise again, then we can trust what he says about the future, including heaven. This can be hard to hold on to when everything around us focuses on the immediate and making the most of this life. When followers of Jesus have doubts, then one thing they can do is ask God for help with these doubts.

**Q7. What if I say I'm a follower of Jesus but not writing out large cheques to enable other people to hear about Jesus?**

Jesus doesn't talk about writing out cheques or giving a certain amount. That's because people are given different amounts of "worldly wealth" in the first place. So what investing wisely looks like will differ between people. The other thing to remember is that trying to be the perfect disciple is well nigh impossible. Whatever we deem as the perfect disciple we could always give more. So followers of Jesus need to ask God for forgiveness and help as well. Our bias will be towards self-interest, and so we need to ask for help for God to change us.

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