

## Understanding The Parable of Unjust Steward in Luke 16:1-13 in the Context of Nigeria Politicians and Some Church Leaders

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### **Abstract**

*The parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16:1-13 is well known for its vexing exegetical difficulties. Who is the kyrios of v. 8? Why would he praise a dishonest steward? How could Jesus possibly hold the steward up as an example for his followers? What is the relationship of verses 8b-13 to the rest of the parable? Traditionally Luke 16:1-13 has been understood as portraying a steward who cheats his master but who is commended for his wisdom, a quality to be imitated by Christ's disciples in their use of material possessions in light of the coming eschatological kingdom. But the difficulties in the parable have elicited variety of challenges to this consensus. In answer to the question of how a master could praise a dishonest steward, some scholars have postulated on socioeconomic grounds that the steward's actions were not really unjust at all and that he was merely releasing his commission. Others have seen the parable as a clear case of irony or have appealed to textual emendation or mistranslations of an Aramaic original. Furthermore most scholars deny that vv. 8b-13 have anything to do with the original Parable and that the parable has anything to do with wealth. This paper examines Nigerians politicians that looted the treasury yet some of our fathers in the Lord instead of rebuking them after they have destroyed the Economy they still praise and celebrate them as national Heroes. The paper concludes that it is not a crime to be wealthy but it must be acquired in a godly way and should be used to assist the poor and to propagate the kingdom of God on earth.*

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**Keywords:** *Unjust steward, Corrupt Politicians, Nigeria Clergy*

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### **Introduction**

The parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-8) is generally considered to be one of the most puzzling parables of Jesus. Ostensibly the parable tells the story of a steward who, when accused of financial malfeasance, wastes even more funds in an attempt to ingratiate himself with his employer's clients. The steward is then, inexplicably, commended by his employer. Finally, disciples of Jesus are encouraged to emulate the steward's example. Faithfulness - the parable of the shrewd manager

In this passage Luke records the parable of the shrewd manager, v1-8a, Jesus' application of the parable, v8b and three appended sayings: generosity with money, v9; faithfulness with money, v10-12; serving God rather than the things of this world, v13. The message is simple, "disciples

who do not show faithfulness in this life cannot expect to enter the life of the age to come", Ellis. Thus we are reminded that the "children of light" are foolish to think that it is possible to be loyal to God, and at the same time dabble into these world things. Given the immediacy of the kingdom we face disaster and need urgently to find a way of escape.

The sixth and last episode in this teaching unit, 16:1-13, is notoriously difficult to interpret. The opening parable has prompted numerous interpretations and so the interpretation offered here, namely that *the children of light are anything but prudent*, is but one among many, v1-8. The point made by the parable is supported by appended sayings on the proper handling of material possessions, v9-13. These sayings have also proved notoriously difficult to interpret since they serve as further examples of Jesus' *utopian* ethic. Obviously, allegorical interpretations of the parable itself can be abandoned, although most commentators stray a little in this direction, eg. Johnson: Like the manager's clever response, "the children of light should be discerning in their response to the 'visitation of their Lord'" and "as the manager used possessions to secure a place for himself, so should the disciples". Note also how Johnson, at this point, is dangling his toe into a salvation by works theology. Also Plummer: a believer should lay up "treasure in heaven" by using their "wealth to promote their welfare in the next world."

We are on fairly safe ground if we look for one central idea in the parable which is addressed by the following sayings. Interpretations vary greatly, but most focus on discipleship. Danker stands out from the crowd with his simple exposition; "in the everyday world of business, prudence is exercised to secure temporary advantage. God's people, who have higher goals and expectations, ought to display at least as much prudence in relation to God and their future hope. Yet, when it comes to material possessions, they often forget that the proper use of those possessions is an integral part of their total religious experience." cf. Bock who undertakes a detailed exposition of this passage.

The *discipleship* line of interpretation sits well with the previous episode, 15:1-32. Believers, who have reached a point of repentance and faith, are now called to service. Having placed ourselves under the grace of God we need to remember that "no person can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and the things of this world." The dishonest steward wisely prepared for his judgment day (unemployment), similarly, the sons of light need to prepare for their judgment day (the great assize). So, let us wisely use our resources of time, talent and tinkle, all of which is on loan from the Creator, before it's too late. "One serves a master no matter what, so make sure that it is God", Bock.

Commentators tend to develop this general discipleship exhortation in different ways. For example, Fitzmyer suggests that Luke has actually provided 3 separate applications: i] A prudent use of material possessions, eg. almsgiving, 8b-9; ii] Day-to-day responsibility and fidelity, v10-12; iii] A warning - don't let wealth become the god we serve, v13.

In principle, the law (here, the *utopian* [as opposed to *utilitarian*] ethic of Jesus) always serves as a guide to the Christian life and so there is little doubt that this passage reminds the believer to handle worldly wealth wisely. Yet, we need to consider the possibility that Luke still has in mind his great reversal / judgment theme. The primary purpose of the law is to expose our condition of loss, our state of sin. Ellis, in his uncompromising style, describes the discipleship demanded of us in this passage in rather dramatic terms - "disciples who do not show faithfulness in this life cannot expect to enter the life of the age to come." Well! maybe, but then here's the rub, can any believer claim to have faithfully used their resources wisely and well? Pharisaic reductionism

(reducing the law's demand to the point where it can be obeyed) is oft suggested (eg. Jesus is only talking about alms-giving / the tithe), but such provides no protection on the Day of Judgment. So then, we are bound to consider the possibility that this episode is not primarily about discipleship, but about judgment. Our passage for study reminds us that none of us are "faithful"; it serves again to expose our sinful state (here our attachment to the things of this world) and thus our eternal loss. When it comes to securing our eternal future, we "children of light" are fools, anything but "prudent". How do we know that this is the case? Because when it comes to the things of this world, things on loan to us by God, we serve them, always serve them to secure our future here on earth, rather than our eternal future in heaven. We cannot serve God and at the same time the things of this world, and thus we stand condemned. How then shall we be saved?

The parable of *The Shrewd Manager* confronts us with the crisis caused by the coming kingdom, cf. Dodd. It serves as "a warning .... to take resolute and immediate action in the face of impending disaster", Caird. In the attached sayings, the "utopian" ethic of Jesus, again performs its prime function to expose sin and thus reinforce the disaster we face. By the placement of this episode in his gospel, Luke maintains his prime directive to reveal, in the presence of the coming kingdom, the condemnation of the "righteous" under the law, in contrast to the blessing of the humble (repentant) under grace.

### Exegesis of Luke Chapter 16:1-13

The stewardship demanded of a disciple, v1-13: i] The parable of the Shrewd Manager, v1-8a. This illustrative parable teaches that in the face of disaster the worldly-wise use whatever opportunity they have to find a way out. **δέ και** - and. This construction is common in Luke, here presumably a connective,. 1 Ἐλεγεν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς Ἄνθρωπός τις ἦν πλούσιος ὃς εἶχεν οἰκονόμον, καὶ οὗτος διεβλήθη αὐτῷ ὡς διασκορπίζων τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ. 2 καὶ φωνήσας αὐτὸν εἶπεν αὐτῷ Τί τοῦτο ἀκούω περὶ σοῦ; ἀπόδος τὸν λόγον τῆς οἰκονομίας σου· οὐ γὰρ δύνη ἐτι οἰκονομεῖν. 3 εἶπεν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὁ οἰκονόμος Τί ποιήσω, ὅτι ὁ κύριός μου ἀφαιρεῖται τὴν οἰκονομίαν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ; σκάπτειν οὐκ ἰσχύω, ἐπαιτεῖν αἰσχύνομαι. 4 ἔγνων τί ποιήσω, ἵνα ὅταν μετασταθῶ ἐκ τῆς οἰκονομίας δέξωνταί με εἰς τοὺς οἴκους ἑαυτῶν. 5 καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος ἕνα ἕκαστον τῶν χρεοφειλετῶν τοῦ κυρίου ἑαυτοῦ ἔλεγεν τῷ πρώτῳ Πόσον ὀφείλεις τῷ κυρίῳ μου; 6 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν Ἐκατὸν βάτους ἐλαίου. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Δέξαι σου τὰ γράμματα καὶ καθίσας ταχέως γράψον πεντήκοντα. 7 ἔπειτα ἑτέρῳ εἶπεν Σὺ δὲ πόσον ὀφείλεις; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν Ἐκατὸν κόρους σίτου. λέγει αὐτῷ Δέξαι σου τὰ γράμματα καὶ γράψον ὀγδοήκοντα. 8 καὶ ἐπήνεσεν ὁ κύριος τὸν οἰκονόμον τῆς ἀδικίας ὅτι φρονίμως ἐποίησεν· ὅτι οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου φρονιμώτεροι ὑπὲρ τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ φωτός εἰς τὴν γενεὰν τὴν ἑαυτῶν εἰσιν. 9 Καὶ ἐγὼ ὑμῖν λέγω, ἑαυτοῖς ποιήσατε φίλους ἐκ τοῦ μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας, ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλίπη δέξωνται ὑμᾶς εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς. 10 ὁ πιστὸς ἐν ἐλαχίστῳ καὶ ἐν πολλῷ πιστὸς ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ ἐν ἐλαχίστῳ ἄδικος καὶ ἐν πολλῷ ἄδικός ἐστιν. 11 εἰ οὖν ἐν τῷ ἀδίκῳ μαμωνᾶ πιστοὶ οὐκ ἐγένεσθε, τὸ ἀληθινὸν τίς ὑμῖν πιστεύσει; 12 καὶ εἰ ἐν τῷ ἀλλοτρίῳ πιστοὶ οὐκ ἐγένεσθε, τὸ ἡμέτερον τίς δώσει ὑμῖν; 13 Οὐδεὶς οἰκέτης δύναται δυσὶ κυρίοις δουλεύειν· ἢ γὰρ τὸν ἕνα μισήσει καὶ τὸν ἕτερον ἀγαπήσει, ἢ ἐνὸς ἀνθέξεται καὶ τοῦ ἑτέρου καταφρονήσει. οὐ δύνασθε Θεῷ δουλεύειν καὶ μαμωνᾶ.

**Elegen** verb indicative imperfect active 3rd person singular from **le,gw**

[GING] **le,gw**

**le,gw** say—1. generally, *say, tell, give expression to* orally, but also in writing [Hb 8:8](#); [11:32](#). *Make reference to* [Mk 14:71](#). *Mean(s) of foreign terms and names* [Mt 27:33b](#); [J 20:16](#); [1 Cor 10:29](#); of

statements made [Gal 3:17](#); [4:1](#). *Bring charges* [Ac 23:30](#).—**2.** more specifically, of special forms of saying etc. *Ask* [Mt 9:14](#); *Answer* [Mt 4:10](#); [J 1:21](#). *Order, command, direct* [Mk 13:37](#); [Rv 10:9](#). *Assure, assert* [Mk 11:24](#); [Lk 9:27](#). *Maintain, declare, proclaim. Speak, report, tell of* [Mk 7:36](#). *Call, name.* [legend] [pg 117]

**maqhta,j** noun accusative masculine plural from **maqth,j**

[GING] **maqth,j**

**maqth,j, oul, o`** *learner, pupil, disciple*—**1.** *pupil, apprentice* [Mt 10:24f](#); [Lk 6:40](#).—**2.** *disciple, adherent* [Mt 10:1](#); [22:16](#); practically = *Christian* [Ac 6:1f, 7](#); [13:52](#). [pg 121]

**oivkono,mon** noun accusative masculine singular from **oivkono,moj**

[GING] **oivkono,moj**

**oivkono,moj, ou, o`** (*house*) *steward, manager*—**1.** *lit.* [Lk 12:42](#); *o` oivk) th/j po,lewj the city treasurer* [Ro 16:23](#).—**2.** *fig. administrator* [1 Cor 4:1](#); [*economics*] [pg 137]

**diaskorpi,zwn** verb participle present active nominative masculine singular from **diaskorpi,zw**

[GING] **diaskorpi,zw**

**diaskorpi,zw** *scatter, disperse* [Mk 14:27](#); *waste, squander* [Lk 15:13](#). [pg 47]

[GING] **avfaire,w**

**avfaire,w** *take away, remove, rob* [Lk 1:25](#); *cut off* [Mk 14:47](#). [*aphaeresis, the dropping of a letter or syllable from the beginning of a word*]

[GING] **meqi,sthmi**

**meqi,sthmi** or **meqista,nw** *remove* [Ac 13:22](#); [1 Cor 13:2](#); *transfer* [Col 1:13](#); *pass. be discharged* [Lk 16:4](#). *Turn away, mislead* [Ac 19:26](#).

[GING] **proskale,w**

**proskale,w** *mid. summon*—**1.** *lit. summon, call to oneself, invite* [Mt 10:1](#); [23](#); [Js 5:14](#).—**2.** *fig.* [Ac 2:39](#); [13:2](#); [16:10](#).

[GING] **ovfei,lw**

**avllotri,w|** adjective dative masculine singular no degree from **avllo,trioj**

[GING] **avllo,trioj**

**avllo,trioj, ia, ion** *belonging to another, strange, foreign* [Lk 16:12](#); *avllotri,oij evpi,skopoj meddling in other people's affairs* [1 Pt 4:15](#) v.l. *Hostile, enemy* [Hb 11:34](#). [pg 9]

**evlaci,stw|** adjective dative neuter singular superlative from **evla,cistoj**

[GING] **evla,cistoj**

**evla,cistoj, i,sth, on** used as superlative of **mikro,j**: *smallest, least* [1 Cor 15:9](#). Usually reduced in degree *very small, quite unimportant, insignificant* [Mt 2:6](#); [Js 3:4](#); *trivial* [1 Cor 6:2](#); *least important, of little importance* [Mt 25:40, 45](#); With comparative ending added *very least* [Eph 3:8](#). [pg 62]

[GING] **ovli,goj**

**ovli,goj, h, on**—**1.** plural *few, a few* [Mt 9:37](#); [Rv 2:14](#); [3:4](#).—**2.** singular *little, small, short* [Lk 7:47](#); [Ac 12:18](#);—**3.** the neut. **ovli,gon** in adverbial expressions *a little* [Rv 17:10](#). *evn ovli,gw| in brief* [Eph 3:3](#), but *in a short time* [Ac 26:28](#), cf. vs. [29](#). *pro.j ovli,gon for a short time* [Js 4:14](#), but *for (a) little* [1 Ti 4:8](#). [*oligarchy, ovli,goj + a;rkein*] [pg 138]

**Luke 16:8** **ku,rioj** noun nominative masculine singular from **ku,rioj**

[GING] **ku,rioj**

**ku,rioj**, **ou**, **o** *lord, Lord, master*—**1.** generally—**a.** *owner, master* [Mt 6:24](#); [Gal 4:1](#); *lord, master*, one who has full control of something [Mt 9:38](#); [Mk 2:28](#).—**b.** as a respectful designation used in addressing persons of varying social or political rank, often equivalent to our *sir* [Mt 27:63](#); [Rv 7:14](#). (*My*) *master* [1 Pt 3:6](#).—**2.** in specialized usage—**a.** as a designation of God [Mt 5:33](#);—**b.** as a designation of the Roman emperor [Ac 25:26](#).—**c.** as a designation of Jesus Christ, with emphasis on his authority and frequently in contrast to *dou/loj*. Because of the editorial interests of the Evangelists it is difficult to determine the precise level of social recognition or status awareness in reported dialogue. [Mt 20:31](#); [Rv 22:20](#).—**d.** In some passages it is not clear whether God or Christ is meant, e.g. [1 Cor 4:19](#); [2 Th 3:16](#).—**e.** as designation of a divine messenger [Ac 10:4](#).—**f.** in general of beings or persons who elicit devotion appropriate to deity (deities) [1 Cor 8:5](#)

[GING] **evla,sswn**

**evla,sswn**, **e;lasson** (the Attic *evla,ttwn* is found [1 Ti 5:9](#); [Hb 7:7](#)) used as comparative of *mikro,j*: *smaller = younger* [Ro 9:12](#); *inferior* [J 2:10](#); [Hb 7:7](#); v.l. Adv. *e;latton* *less* [1 Ti 5:9](#).\*

**avdi,kw|** adjective dative neuter singular no degree from **a;dikoj**

[GING] **a;dikoj**

**a;dikoj**, **on** *unjust, unrighteous* [Mt 5:45](#); [1 Pt 3:18](#); *dishonest, untrustworthy* [Lk 16:10](#). [

**ovfei,lw** *owe, be indebted*—**1.** lit., of financial debts [Mt 18:28](#).—**2.** fig.—**a.** generally *owe, be indebted* [Ro 13:8](#).—*Be obligated, one must, one ought* [Lk 17:10](#).—**b.** *ovfei,lei* *he is obligated, bound* (by his oath) [Mt 23:16](#), [18](#). *Commit a sin* [Lk 11:4](#)—**avgapa,w** *to love, have affection for*—**1.** of persons: God [J 3:16](#), Jesus [Mk 10:21](#), and people [2 Cor 12:15](#) *love, cherish, show the greatest solicitude for*, of the finest and most typical Christian virtue (more frequent and typically Christian than *file,w* but prob. equivalent to it in [J 21:15–17](#)). *Prove or show love (for)* [J 13:1](#); [1 J 3:18](#).—**2.** of the love for things *love, long for, value, hold in high esteem*

### **Unjust Steward in the Government of Nigeria System**

Nigerian Tribune Monday, 13 February, 2017 reported the case of former governor of Delta State, Chief James Ibori who has declared that he did no wrong to warrant his incarceration of a United Kingdom Prison. This was just as he said had, however, forgives his jailers and handed them over to God. It must be noted here that like Jesus who frowned at the unjust steward he wanted us to be freed and fare to acquire wealth but it is not the same with the Chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), South South, Archbishop Goddowell Awomakpa, in his sermon entitled ‘‘knowing the Gift of God as someone who is obsessed with putting smiles on other people’s faces. He added that great people like Ibori usually had great troubles, but God usually delivered them from all. The present Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan spent three fifty millions (350,000,000) for Ibori freedom thanksgiving service, held at the First Baptist Church, Ogharefe, Ethiope West Local Government Area of Delta State.

In a related story, The Punch Monday, December 19, 2016 reported Mr. Lawal Babachir Secretary to the Federal Government who alleged complicity in contract award in the IDP camps in the

North- East. Lawal, who denied the entire allegation, described them as balderdash even as he said they were animal at pulling him down. But Falana said Lawal's statement was not a denial, stressing that it was a confirmation of the allegation leveled against him. Falana added if those involved in corruption are allowed to remain in government and treated like sacred cows; the government will lose the entire moral to fight corruption.

“All the corrupt members of the cabinet have to be shown the way out, they have to be flushed out.” However if Mr. Femi Falana who was never a pastor can come out to rebuke a corrupt politician like that what stops some of our spiritual and Church leaders to correct those that are wasting the country resources and still use it to buy the consciences of all these clergy. Moreover, the efforts of Venerable Tayo Aduloju should not be hidden here when the then P.D.P South West chairman chief Olabode George came to Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion Marina in Lagos to do thanks giving after diverting several million of Nigeria Port Authority into his own personal account the man of God did not hesitate to rebuke and corrected him and tell him to go and sin no more beside the fact that chief Bode George was expecting the man of God to praise him. This man of God showed and emulated Jesus Christ by rebuking the unjust steward and discouraged any of his followers who may want to make the kingdom of heaven.

General Buhari in January 1984 said

“The economic mess, the corruption and the unacceptable level of unemployment...The shameless rigging and widespread, perversion of the electoral process could not, in all honesty, have been said to produce a government of the people by the people... The ordinary Nigerians who certainly has the fundamental right to live in dignity had become enslaved by a handful of Nigerians whose main interest was not only to perpetuate themselves, in office, at any cost but also to share among themselves the wealth of the country while the ordinary man wallowed deeper and deeper in misery... a government that itself created conditions that promoted insecurity was obviously not in a position to check those activities.

### **UNJUST STEWARD**

Those who plundered the national treasury openly were the least able to check other less miscreants, their so-called ethical revolution programme notwithstanding”

However, the Dawn broadcast of Brigadier Sani Abacha on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1984 referred to the;

“... grave economic predicament and uncertainty which an inept and corrupt leadership has imposed on our beloved nation. I am referring to the Larch and intolerable conditions under which we are now living. Our economy has been hopelessly mismanaged; we have become a debtor and beggar nation. There is inadequate of food at reasonable prices for our people who are now fed up with an endless announcement of importation of food- stuff. Health Service is in shambles as our hospitals are reduced to mere consulting clinics without drugs, water and equipment. Our educational system is deteriorating at alarming rate; unemployment figures including the graduates have reached embarrassing and unacceptable proportions in some states workers are being owed salary arrears of eight to twelve months salary cuts. Yet our leaders lived in squander mania, corruption and indiscipline... After due consultation over these deplorable condition, I and my colleagues in the Armed Forces have in the discharge of our national role as promoters and protectors of our national interests decided to effect a change in leadership of the government of Federal Republic of Nigeria”

What has been revealed as at then has merely confirmed the finding of the Ayo Irikefe Tribunal of higurry of 1980, which among other things showed how the Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC) was virtually irrelevant in the management and control of the oil industry.

The highlights of the Request are:

- A. These companies had practically unlimited freedom to operate. The tribunal pointed out that they were “free to choose what technology they wish to adapt for their production, they (were) free to develop each year... work programmes and corresponding budgets for their operation”
- B. All the fire expert terminals from where our crude oil was being exported and controlled by these companies. They therefore determine and control the shipment of our crude oil. This is more so because the agents of the Federal Government at these terminals in Escakaros Foreados, Brass, Bonny.
- C. Qua Iboe functional as appendages to these giant companies. The chairman of the crude oil sales was quoted saying that “It is very difficult if not impossible to determine the volume of crude oil being taken away from this country...(because) the companies makes the NNPC oil inspectors happy... They give them enough of imported beer to drink. And while drinking beer, oil is being pumped and lifted out of our country. We do not believe that these and many malpractices and lapses in the management and control of the most crucial sectors of our economy were merely administration oversight. Rather, it is deliberate sabotage organized by the oil companies in collaboration with top level public officers, some NNPC staff and security personal.

Recent we heard the news about the son of the ex- minister of FCT Abuja that was parading about with 1.1 billion naira cash to buy land houses in Abuja through he was arrested and prosecuted but what was the outcome of the case. Not only that former M.D of NNPC went ahead to hide £9.8 million inside inhabited building where more than 150 million cannot afford to eat three meals if such a person is still released from either police custody or jail . they will still go to church for thanksgiving and those corrupt ministers of God will still celebrate them like unjust steward in Luke

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