

Amos 8:4-7

Luke 16:1-13

1 Timothy 2:1-7

“Oh God, you raise the poor from the dust,
and lift the needy from the ash heap
to sit with princes. Praise the Lord!” AMEN!

Alright! Thank you, Jesus
for another crystal clear parable!

Mark Twain once joked that
“It’s not the parts of scripture that
I don’t understand that bother me.

It’s the parts that I do understand.”

So, I guess we should not be bothered
by today’s gospel since

we are left to scratch our heads while
thinking dishonesty and theft are traits
that Jesus would like to see passed
down to his followers,
“the children of light.”

Now we know, that’s not true but he did
want them (and us) to be shrewd.

The same word used to describe
the serpent in Genesis - shrewd.

If you're like me, then you're not very willing
to take on the traits of a snake.

Oh, I'm alright with sinner!

Call me a sinner who come to God
for forgiveness and restoration,
but call me a snake?

Them's fighting words!

Yet, here's the thing, sometimes I wonder
if I am quicker to serve money than
I am to serve God.

And if that's the case, then we are slaves
to the money master, snakes in the world,
and the truth becomes revealed that

the "slave to God" part of our calling
becomes secondary.

Jesus used this parable to correct his listeners,
to correct you and me, from squandering our
call to follow God and to be smart
with the tools we have.

That is what money and wealth should be: a tool.

So be smart with our money.

Shrewd, even! (Pause)

Let's unpack this parable and let it have
its way with us.

"There was a rich man," Jesus began and
his 1st century hearer would automatically know
that this person is NOT the "good guy."

The rest of the sentence confirms that suspicion
for we find he's ready to fire his manager
without investigating the charge
of mismanaging his property.

Like other snakes, he heard a whisper
against someone and said, "You're fired!"

So the manager, or steward, thinks to himself.

"What am I gonna do, now?"

I'm not strong enough for labor and
I'm too proud to beg.

I know, I need to secure shelter, so
I'm gonna help some of the people that
owe money to my former master in hope

that they'll offer me a place to live."

It's a shrewd plan, no doubt,
it's grounded in selfishness,
but this is a parable,
not journalism.

So he calls those indebted to the rich man
to take a look at what they owe.

Now, those who were indebted to the rich man
are accustomed to being abused
by the rich man and his manager.

They're used to the manager skimming funds off
the debt they owe and have no recourse,
that is no one to go to for justice.

They're stuck and have to pay or encounter
the repercussions according the whims.

But, this visit to the manager is different.

It's not the normal shakedown, but almost
"Good News!"

They had their debts drastically reduced.

We might be worrying about how the rich man

is going to respond to this unsanctioned
crediting given by the man he's firing,

but instead of flying off the handle,
the dishonest rich man commends
the snake of a manager because...

well, because he acted like a snake.

Perhaps the rich man wasn't furious because
suddenly people were speaking well of him
about his charity.

Those who'd endured heavy debt
were getting some breathing room.

Maybe it boosted his reputation around town
and that's good for his business, but
it's unlikely that Jesus was teaching
a strategy on gaining clients here.

Instead, he was teaching them, and us,
about money's place.

That truth which says money is a necessary tool
and its power should not be ignored.

Money can cause people, even good people,
to become self-absorbed and callous.

Jesus, in this parable and in other places,
criticized the behavior of wealthy people and
the ways they'd connive and extort in order
to get more money.

Then he reminds his followers that they've (we've)
been called to do things differently with wealth.

To use it as an experienced craftsman uses
one of their tools.

To use money to create something eternal. (Pause)

Chuck Feeney built a personal fortune of
nearly \$9 billion dollars.

Unlike most billionaires, Chuck made it
his life's mission to give away all his money
while he was alive, and he did it anonymously.

By 2020, he fulfilled his goal of giving away
almost everything, while living modestly
and simply.

He did it so others may simply live.

He was quite shrewd to do it in a way
that kept him out of the spotlight. (Pause)

The parable ends as perplexing as everything else.

Jesus concluded the teaching story
with this statement:

And I tell you, make friends for yourself
by means of dishonest wealth so that when
its gone, they may welcome you
into eternal homes.

Like all parables, we find the wisdom gained
from them expands as it returns.

It is about being sure we keep money as a tool
and love it less than God.

It is also about being the kind of “snake”
Jesus calls us to be with money.

Be savvy and shrewd... not in the ways
the world teaches through greed and
ripping people off.

But the kind that utilizes money wisely,
as a necessary tool to help others.

Particularly the least among us.

On that day, money will be useless
to buy ones way into God's realm,
but if it is used it to help the least among us,
the least among us will welcome
you and me into the eternal home.

AMEN!