

## Luke 16:1-15 – Consumer Detox wk 4 ‘IDOL’ (BCP) (Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2014)

Continuing Lent sermon series: Consumer Detox. Based on book about we live as Christians in a consumer society. Lou’s description: *an invitation to less stuff and more life as we go on a journey of greater freedom from the temptations and trappings of our consumer culture.*

So far: Thorns, Money, Sabbath – now return to issue of money but with a slightly different slant.

Address it via one of the most difficult passages in gospels – challenging for short talk. Shrewd manager – why does the master commend him? Is God or Jesus praising something sinful? What does it mean? (Secondary question: lots of applics – do they all relate to this passage?)

Enigma – no certain answers: three main interps:

1. Manager originally inept/wasteful not dishonest – and rescues situation with ingenious solution. Master commends his ingenuity, and then Jesus makes a series of points about money loosely based around general principles. OK: but story not internally consistent – compounding one sin with another, and interpretation lacks a little cohesion.
2. Manager is dishonest from start, but when he scales down the bills he is sacrificing his own cut (commission). Thus he rescues his reputation with the master and his debtors by his generosity. Better: Jesus now commending something praiseworthy. But no evidence that was commission, either in story or in Jesus’ interpretation.
3. Manager dishonest throughout, and his solution to his problem his supreme act of dishonesty: showcases his character but in a way which implicates others (and therefore protects him). The master – who is probably an absentee landlord and something of a rascal himself, happy to let his debtors accrue huge debts – sees a kindred spirit and praises him.

This interp sees v8 as key verse – the punchline which unlocks the parable: READ – and Barclay ‘wiser in their generation’. In other words: READ Barclay p216. This gets round the problem of why Jesus seems to commend it: he’s basically saying: if only followers of God paid as much attention to being followers as worldly people did to their obsessions. If only we had that dedication, focus and above all consistency. The manager acted entirely in character: do we Christians have that same consistency of character, worshipping God consistently in our behaviour?

This links the parable better to what comes next. Jesus uses the issue of money to make this point about consistency of behaviour because in Luke money is the biggest litmus test of our worship. It’s the one thing that distracts us most often from worshipping God. How we use money says a lot about who we worship, and whether we apply that consistency in our behaviour. So, taking the example of the manager, what does a godly attitude to money look like?

**Very simple: v9 – READ. Be generous with it.** Two benefits: we become friends with others in this world, and friends with God in the next. Generosity (as I said a couple of weeks ago) is the best way to break the grip of money on our lives. It puts it in its proper place and sets us free to worship God. But another reason here too: other people benefit. Everybody wins!

Why is this so important? Here Jesus returns to 2 deeper principles to round off this passage, ones he mentions elsewhere:

V10-11 – *what we do in this life is a good indicator of what we can be trusted with in eternity*. If we get our attitude to money right here, then we’ve got the sort of heavenly perspective that God can use.

V12-13 The biggest one of all: *it comes down to who we worship*. Money desires to master us, and we cannot serve both God and money. Interesting

Jesus uses word 'mammon' in v9 – 'use mammon' to win friends. Mammon desires to be worshipped: but if we give it away, if we use it, it breaks its power, it sits in its proper place.

That was the problem with the Pharisees. They didn't have that consistency that the dishonest manager had. They might have been religious zealots, but as Luke says (v14), they loved money. Their hearts were divided. They professed great love for God, but their hearts were captured by other things as well.

The people of the light, as Jesus says, have got to be wiser than that. We have to recognise the pull away from God in every area of our lives and deal with it. READ v9. Is this how we use our money? May God by his grace make it so in our lives.

Amen.