


Lutheran Services in America  
*Together we can*

**Living the Vision  
Do Justice, Love Mercy &  
Walk Humbly with God**

LSA Executive Retreat  
7 October 2006 - NYC




Lutheran Services in America  
*Together we can*

***Justice and Mercy***

Mark G. Vitalis Hoffman  
Lutheran Theological Seminary  
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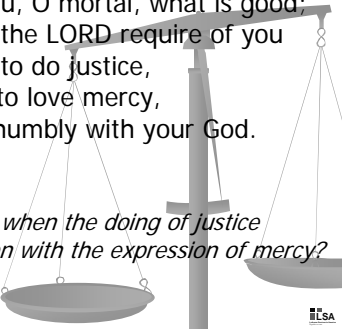
[www.gettysburgseminary.org/mhoffman](http://www.gettysburgseminary.org/mhoffman)



**Micah 6:8**

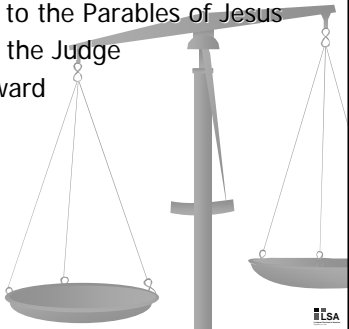
[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice,  
and to love mercy,  
and to walk humbly with your God.

*What happens when the doing of justice  
seems to be in tension with the expression of mercy?*



**Justice and Mercy**

- An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus
- The Widow and the Judge
- The Unjust Steward

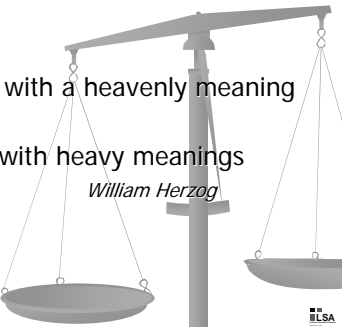


**Introduction to Parables**

A parable is:

- An earthly story with a heavenly meaning
- An earthly story with heavy meanings

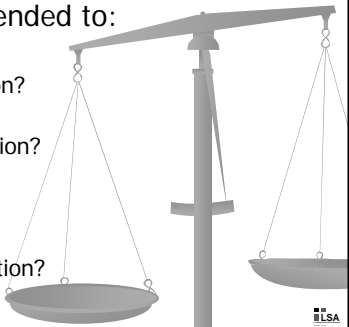
*William Herzog*



**Introduction to Parables**

Is a parable intended to:

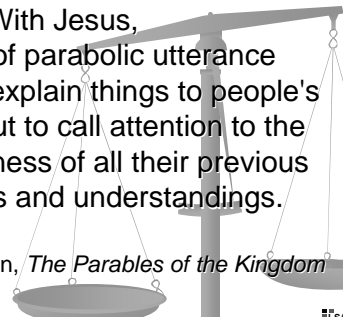
- Convey information?
- Challenge perception?
- Elicit response
- Cause transformation?



## Introduction to Parables

With Jesus,  
the device of parabolic utterance  
is used not to explain things to people's  
satisfaction but to call attention to the  
unsatisfactoriness of all their previous  
explanations and understandings.

Robert Farrar Capon, *The Parables of the Kingdom*



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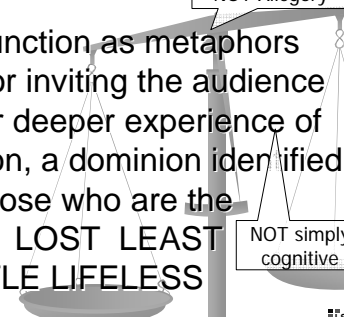
## Introduction to Parables

Parables function as metaphors  
challenging or inviting the audience  
into a new or deeper experience of  
God's dominion, a dominion identified  
with those who are the  
**LAST LOST LEAST  
LITTLE LIFELESS**

Unifying theme

NOT Allegory

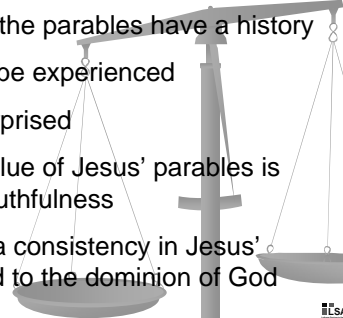
NOT simply cognitive



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## The Parables of Jesus

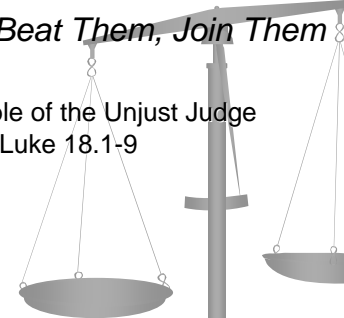
- Keep in mind the context
- Remember that the parables have a history
- Parables are to be experienced
- Expect to be surprised
- The enduring value of Jesus' parables is rooted in their truthfulness
- We can expect a consistency in Jesus' message related to the dominion of God



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## *If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them*

The Parable of the Unjust Judge  
Luke 18.1-9



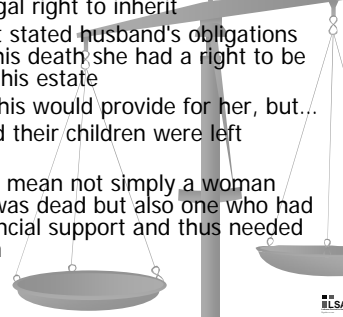
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## On Widows:

from B. B. Scott, *Hear Them...*, p. 180

According to the customs of the day:

- Widow had no legal right to inherit
- Marriage contract stated husband's obligations to wife, and on his death she had a right to be supported out of his estate
- ... and normally this would provide for her, but...
- Many widows and their children were left destitute
- "Widow" came to mean not simply a woman whose husband was dead but also one who had no means of financial support and thus needed special protection




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## On Widows

*Psalm 68.5*

Father of orphans and protector of widows  
is God in his holy habitation.



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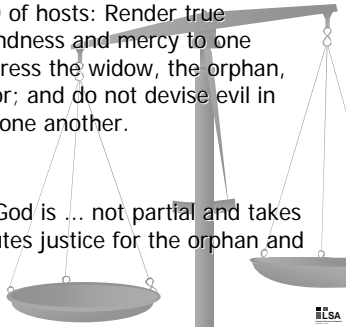
## On Judges

*Zechariah 7.9-10*

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.

*Deuteronomy 10.17-18*

For the LORD your God is ... not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow.

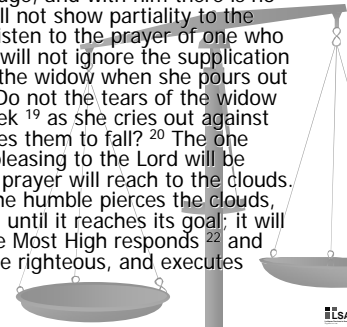


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## On Widows and Judges

Sirach 35:13-22

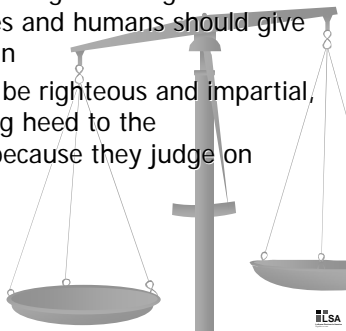
The Lord is the judge, and with him there is no partiality. <sup>16</sup> He will not show partiality to the poor; but he will listen to the prayer of one who is wronged. <sup>17</sup> He will not ignore the supplication of the orphan, or the widow when she pours out her complaint. <sup>18</sup> Do not the tears of the widow run down her cheek <sup>19</sup> as she cries out against the one who causes them to fall? <sup>20</sup> The one whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted, and his prayer will reach to the clouds. <sup>21</sup> The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, and it will not rest until it reaches its goal; it will not desist until the Most High responds <sup>22</sup> and does justice for the righteous, and executes judgment.



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## On Widows and Judges

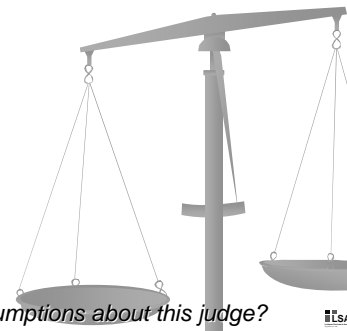
- **Widows** are among the marginalized to whom God does and humans should give special attention
- **Judges** are to be righteous and impartial, especially giving heed to the marginalized, because they judge on God's behalf



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## Luke 18.2-5

<sup>2</sup> In a certain city there was a judge

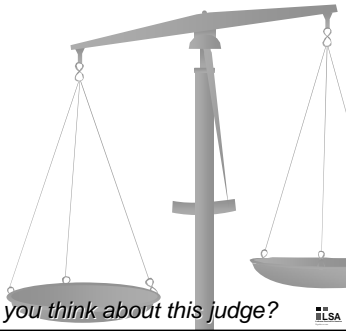


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*What are your assumptions about this judge?*

## Luke 18.2-5

<sup>2</sup> In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.



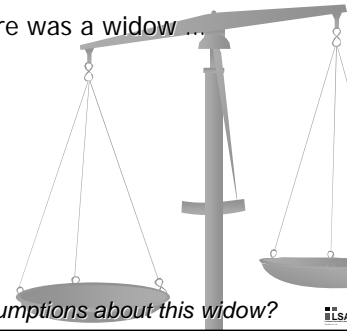
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*Now what do you think about this judge?*

## Luke 18.2-5

<sup>2</sup> In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.

<sup>3</sup> In that city there was a widow ...



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*What are your assumptions about this widow?*

### Luke 18.2-5

<sup>2</sup> In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.

<sup>3</sup> In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying,

*'Grant me justice against my opponent.'*

*ekDIKew*

*antiDIKos*

*Does the widow have a just case?  
Who is the opponent?*

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### Luke 18.2-5

<sup>2</sup> In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people.

<sup>3</sup> In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying,

*'Grant me justice against my opponent.'*

<sup>4</sup> For a while he refused;

*Why does the judge refuse?*

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### Luke 18.2-5

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*'Grant me justice against my opponent.'*

<sup>4</sup> For a while he refused; but later he said to himself,

*'Though I have no fear of God  
and no respect for anyone,*

*<sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'*

*upôpiazô*  
*Why does the judge finally "grant her justice"?*

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### Luke 18.2-5

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*<sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'*

*Where is the focus of this parable?*

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### Luke 18.1-8a

<sup>2</sup> He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. <sup>3</sup> In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' <sup>4</sup> For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"

<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge (*ho kritês tês aDIKias*) says.

<sup>7</sup> And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them.

*Who is the 'God figure' ?  
How does the parable make sense?*

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### Luke 18.2-5

*If an unjust judge ultimately grants justice...*

*What does that say about God? It says that God is willing to be perceived as a bad God—and for no better reason than that he wants to get the problems of a worldful of losing winners off his back. It says he is willing—while they are still mired in their futile pursuit of the spiritual buck, the moral buck, the intellectual buck, the physical buck, or the plain ordinary buck—to just shut up about whatever is wrong with them and get the hassle over with. It says in fact what Paul said in Rom. 5:8: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." ... God simply .. wants to get the wet blankets off his back and let the party begin.*

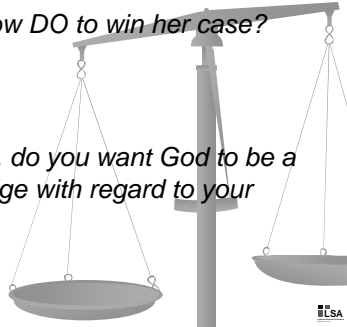
Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Judgment, Grace*, p 332

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## Luke 18.2-5

What did the widow DO to win her case?

On Judgment Day, do you want God to be a 'just' or 'unjust' judge with regard to your case?



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## Luke 18.1-8

| Parable (vv. 2-5)                               | Allegorical Correlation (Frame: vv. 1, 6-8)   |
|---|---|
| 1a. A widow seeking justice (v. 3)              | 1b. The elect waiting for vindication (vv. 7, 8)  |
| 2a. A judge refusing to give vindication (v. 4) | 2b. Implied adversity to the elect (vv. 1, 7, 8)  |
| 3a. Perseverance of the widow (vv. 3-5)         | 3b. Perseverance of the elect in prayer, and an imperative not to lose heart (vv. 1, 7)                                 |
| 4a. The widow's pleas (v. 3)                    | 4b. Prayers of the elect, crying out day and night (v. 1, 7)  |
| 5a. The judge's fear of a widow's abuse (v. 5)  | 5b. God will not delay over the elect, but will vindicate them quickly (vv. 7, 8)                                       |
| 6a. The widow is potentially vindicated (v. 5)  | 6b. A promise that the elect will be vindicated, but with a lingering doubt about their perseverance (faith) (vv. 7, 8) |

"Dissonance in Luke 1-8" JBL 121/1 (2002) 107-121 Stephen Curkpatrick

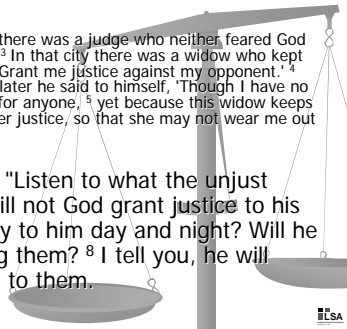
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## Luke 18.1-8a

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

<sup>2</sup> He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. <sup>3</sup> In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' <sup>4</sup> For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"

<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup> And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them."



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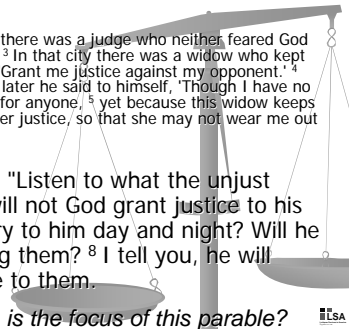
## Luke 18.1-8a

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Now where is the focus of this parable?



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## Luke 18.1-8a

How do you experience the parable now?



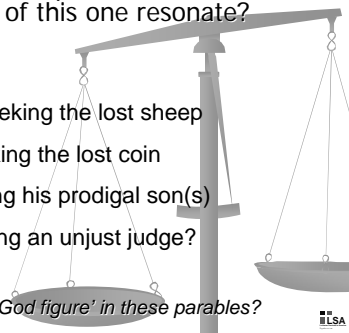
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## Luke 18.1-8a

With what other parables does the experience of this one resonate?

- The shepherd seeking the lost sheep
- The woman seeking the lost coin
- The father seeking his prodigal son(s)
- The widow seeking an unjust judge?

Who is the 'God figure' in these parables?



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## Luke 18.1-8b

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.

<sup>2</sup> He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. <sup>3</sup> In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.'<sup>4</sup> For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'"

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And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

How does this final verse affect your reading of the parable? 


## Luke 18.1-8b

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And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

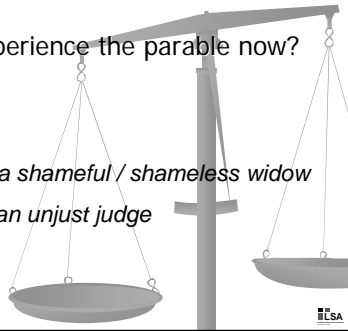
How does this final verse affect your reading of the parable? 

## Luke 18.1-8b

Now where is the focus of this parable?

How do you experience the parable now?

- *The persistence of a shameful / shameless widow*
- *The repentance of an unjust judge*



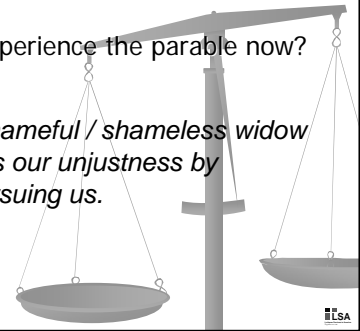


## Luke 18.1-8b

Now where is the focus of this parable?

How do you experience the parable now?

*God is like a shameful / shameless widow who overcomes our unjustness by persistently pursuing us.*



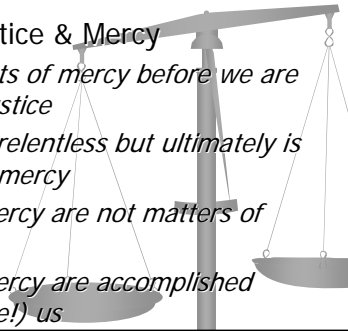


## *If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them*

The Parable of the Unjust Judge  
Luke 18.1-9

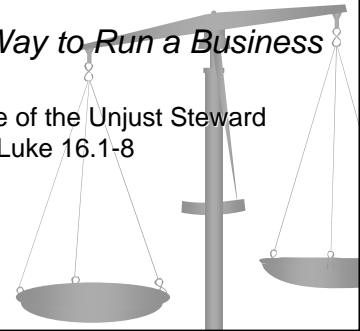
### Justice & Mercy

- *We are recipients of mercy before we are dispensers of justice*
- *God's justice is relentless but ultimately is experienced as mercy*
- *God's justice/mercy are not matters of 'fairness'*
- *God's justice/mercy are accomplished through (despite!) us*



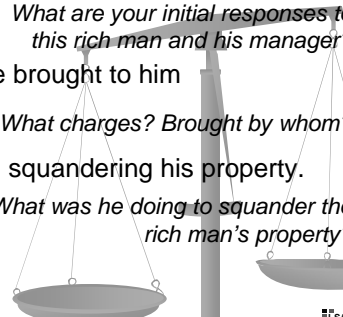
## *Is This Any Way to Run a Business*

The Parable of the Unjust Steward  
Luke 16.1-8



Luke 16.1-9

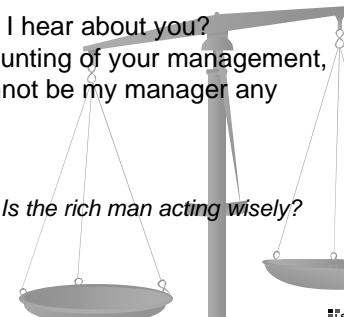
There was a rich man who had a manager,  
*What are your initial responses to this rich man and his manager?*  
 and charges were brought to him  
*What charges? Brought by whom?*  
 that this man was squandering his property.  
*What was he doing to squander the rich man's property?*



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Luke 16.1-9

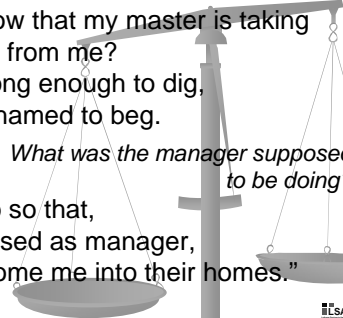
So he summoned him and said to him,  
 "What is this that I hear about you?  
 Give me an accounting of your management,  
 because you cannot be my manager any longer."  
*Is the rich man acting wisely?*



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Luke 16.1-9

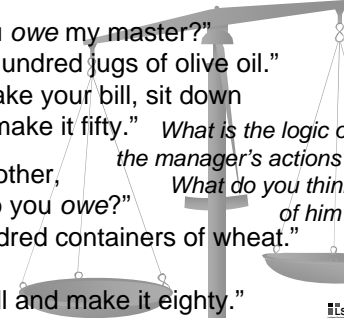
Then the manager said to himself,  
 "What will I do, now that my master is taking  
 the position away from me?  
 I am not strong enough to dig,  
 and I am ashamed to beg.  
*What was the manager supposed to be doing?*  
 I know what to do so that,  
 when I am dismissed as manager,  
 people may welcome me into their homes."



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Luke 16.1-9

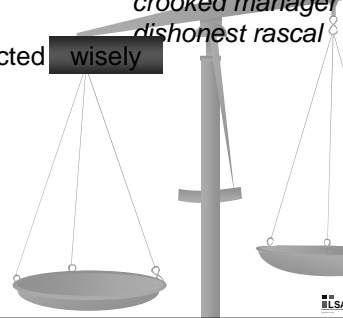
So, summoning his master's *debtors* one by one, he asked the first,  
 "How much do you owe my master?"  
 He answered, "A hundred jugs of olive oil."  
 He said to him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty."  
*What is the logic of the manager's actions?*  
 Then he asked another, *What do you think of him?*  
 "And how much do you owe?"  
 He replied, "A hundred containers of wheat."  
 He said to him,  
 "Take your bill and make it eighty."



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Luke 16.1-9

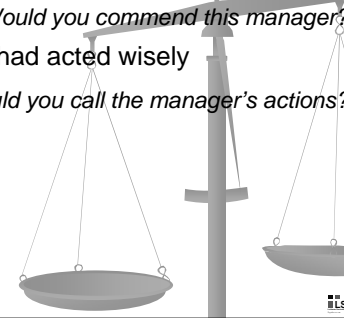
And his master commended the manager of unrighteousness  
*injust steward*  
*crooked manager*  
*dishonest rascal*  
 because he had acted *wisely*



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Luke 16.1-9

And his master commended the manager of unrighteousness  
*Would you commend this manager?*  
 because he had acted wisely  
*What would you call the manager's actions?*

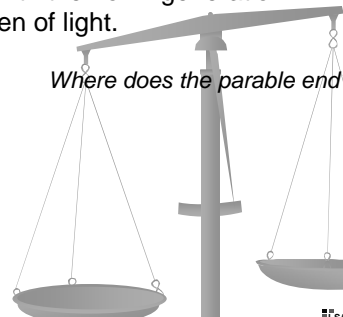


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Luke 16.1-9

... for the children of this age are more shrewd (wiser) in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.

*Where does the parable end?*



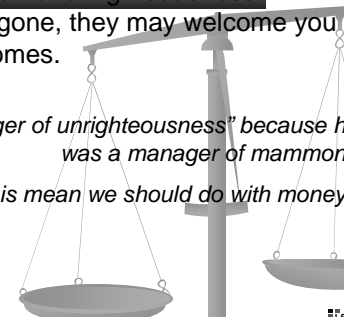
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Luke 16.1-9

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of **mammon of unrighteousness** so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

*Is he a "manager of unrighteousness" because he was a manager of mammon?*

*What does this mean we should do with money?*

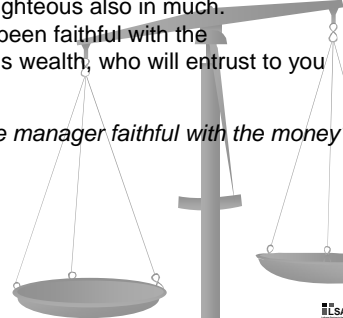


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Luke 16.10-13

Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest/unrighteous in a very little is dishonest/unrighteous also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest/unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?

*How was the manager faithful with the money?*

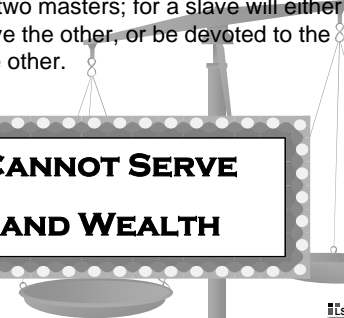


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Luke 16.10-13

And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other.

**YOU CANNOT SERVE  
GOD AND WEALTH**



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*So what's going on here?*

Rich man

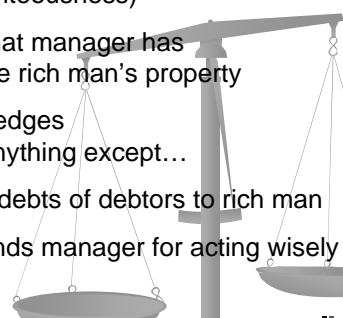
Manager (of unrighteousness)

Charge is made that manager has mismanaged the rich man's property

Manager acknowledges inability to do anything except...

Manager forgives debts of debtors to rich man

Rich man commends manager for acting wisely



ILSA

*So what's going on here?*

Rich man

Manager (of unrighteousness)

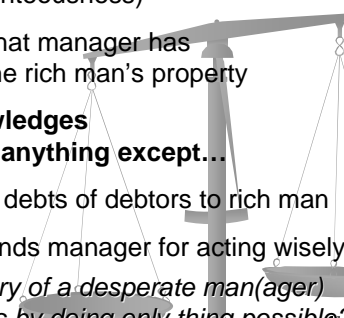
Charge is made that manager has mismanaged the rich man's property

**Manager acknowledges inability to do anything except...**

Manager forgives debts of debtors to rich man

Rich man commends manager for acting wisely

*Is this the story of a desperate man(ager) who responds by doing only thing possible?*



ILSA

*So what's going on here?*

Rich man

Manager (of unrighteousness)

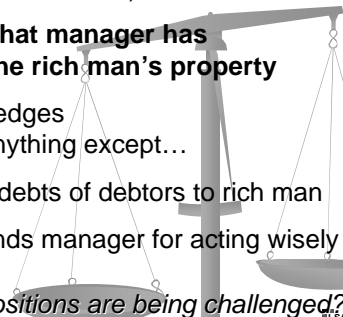
**Charge is made that manager has mismanaged the rich man's property**

Manager acknowledges inability to do anything except...

Manager forgives debts of debtors to rich man

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*What presuppositions are being challenged?*



LSA

*So what's going on here?*

Rich man

Manager (of unrighteousness)

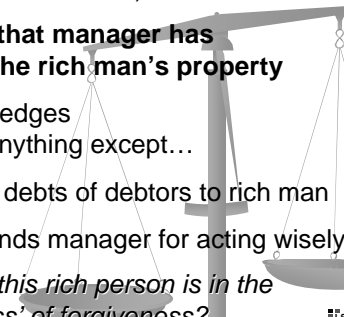
**Charge is made that manager has mismanaged the rich man's property**

Manager acknowledges inability to do anything except...

Manager forgives debts of debtors to rich man

Rich man commends manager for acting wisely

*What if this rich person is in the 'business' of forgiveness?*




LSA

*So what's going on here?*

Lord's Prayer

And forgive us our debts  
as we also forgive our debtors

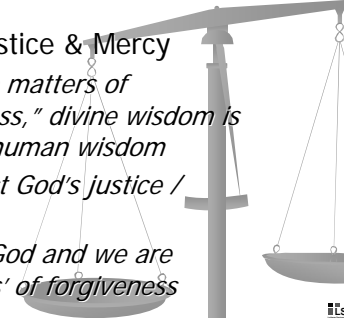


LSA

*Is This Any Way to Run a Business*  
The Parable of the Unjust Steward  
Luke 16.1-8

Justice & Mercy

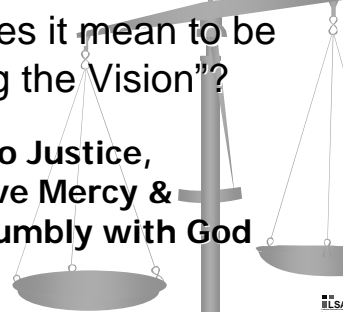
- *With respect to matters of "unrighteousness," divine wisdom is different than human wisdom*
- *We are to enact God's justice / righteousness*
- *It means that God and we are in the 'business' of forgiveness*



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What does it mean to be  
"Living the Vision"?

**Do Justice,  
Love Mercy &  
Walk Humbly with God**



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Lutheran Services in America  
*Together we can*

*Justice and Mercy*

Mark G. Vitalis Hoffman  
Lutheran Theological Seminary  
at Gettysburg

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