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## Sermon on Luke 16:1-10

*'Having Words with Jesus | Debts are Tossed'*

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*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [Phil 1,2] Amen.*

### ::: ONE :::

My dear sisters and brothers,

Honestly, this parable that Jesus tells, this story of the strange steward and his equally strange master, leaves us with lots of questions.

Debts are tossed... but in such a strange way.

How can Jesus make use of a story of *deception* including the *deceiver* and the *deceived*—and turn it into a lesson for his followers?

The only thing which comes to my mind here is: This is absolutely impossible.

And I am sure that Jesus does not think that deception is any good.

It simply does not fit in with the message of peace and justice that I've learned from him.

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But, after rethinking this story over and over again, I am convinced that we have to look at one thing at a time.

::: TWO :::

The world of this parable—this is what we have to look at first.

Jesus first sets the framework for the whole story. The whole story takes place in an environment of abundant wealth.

At this point he builds up a kind of parallel universe, of which his followers must have immediately realized:

*This is not my world.*

What happens here has actually nothing to do with me or with Jesus himself.

So, it is obvious:

This is not about ethical instructions, not about how people should act well.

This can't be the point at all.

This story here directly follows the story of the prodigal son—or, as I like to call it: of the rediscovered father.

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The story of the rediscovered father gives insight in how God acts: *Merciful, forgiving, accepting.*

When Jesus here tells the story of a rich man and his steward, he enters a completely opposite world.

This is not a parable about the kingdom of heaven or the goodness of God. This is about something quite different.

And the question is: What exactly is it about?

### ::: THREE :::

The story reads:

*“There was a rich man who had a manager,  
and charges were brought to him  
that this man was squandering his property.*

*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.’*

‘You cannot be my manager any longer ’, this is the crucial phrase.

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It is not at all about the question of whether the manager has actually done something wrong or whether he is really unfaithful.

Hearsay is enough to deliver the rich man's judgment.

*Then the manager said to himself,  
'What will I do, now that my master  
is taking the position away from me?*

The manager could clearly see the writing on the wall.

The relationship with his master cannot be fixed any more. And strictly speaking, it was never in order.

Values like trust or the like do not play a role here.

It is clear to the manager that everything has already gone down the drain.

#### ::: FOUR :::

There is nothing left to mend here, it is only a matter of getting ready for the best possible future.

And that's exactly what he does, with what is in his ability.

His master has already written him off anyway. And because he recognises this, he can now confidently write off his master as well—for the sake of his own future.

And so, by deceiving, by betraying his master, who had already dropped him anyway, he creates a good starting position for the future.

It seems absolutely diabolic that the master classifies this as clever behaviour—and thus pays tribute to his servant. As if he was saying: Hats off, I wouldn't have thought you capable of so much cunning.

### ::: FIVE :::

In a nutshell, we can say that the steward recognised the signs of the times and then acted in such a way that he left the old behind and turned completely to the future.

Jesus comments this like:

*[...] for the children of this age  
are more shrewd in dealing*

*with their own generation  
than are the children of light.*

I interpret it like this:

You children of light also no longer belong to the old world. You now belong to me and I am your future.

The old world has already expelled you anyway. So, leave it behind, take what you need to live now as children of the Kingdom of God. For this is where your home is now.

Therefore, this story is almost a kind of interpretation to Jesus' word:

*No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Lk 9:62)*

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What is astonishing is that even as the manager turns away from his old master, he suddenly begins to cancel debts. He tosses the debts of the debtors.

This acting allows the debtors a chance to breathe again—a sigh of relief.

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A a change of perspective is already taking place here.

What do I have to do so that people are favourably disposed towards me? I have to give them back a piece of freedom.

And growing freedom a characteristic of the new world: People shall regain freedom, air to breathe, space to live, hope to go on.

::: SEVEN :::

Living fully in the new world. A prayer from the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp can show us what it means to leave this old system completely behind in order to be on the way in the thinking, in the values of the new, of the Kingdom of God. This prayer says:

*Peace to the people who are of evil will,  
and an end to all revenge and all talk  
of punishment and chastisement.*

*The cruelties are beyond anything  
that has ever been seen,  
they go beyond the limits  
of human comprehension,  
and numerous are the martyrs. –*

*Therefore, O God,  
weigh not their sufferings  
upon the bowls of thy justice.*

*Do not seek a cruel reckoning,  
but reckon them differently:  
Let them be credited to all executioners,  
traitors, and spies, and all evil men,*

*and forgive them for the sake of the courage  
and strength of the souls of others. -  
All good should count, not evil.*

*And in the memory of our enemies  
we should not live on as their victims,  
not as their nightmare and ghastly spectres,  
but rather to come to their aid,  
that they may desist from their delusion. –*

*This alone is required of them,  
and that, when all is over,  
we may live as men among men,  
and that peace may once again  
reign on this poor earth...  
to the people who are of good will  
and that this peace may also come  
to the others.*

*::: Amen.*