



St Marylebone
Parish Church

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The 'Kingdom of God' is a central theme of St Luke's Gospel.

Sometimes small, it will have huge influenceⁱ;

it is good newsⁱⁱ – especially for the poorⁱⁱⁱ – but not such good news for the wealthy and the powerful who have become reliant on their position and status and wealth.^{iv}

To enter the kingdom comes at quite a price, but in monetary terms is free^v requiring single-minded perseverance^{vi} and trust above all. Not everyone *will* get in^{vii}, but *anyone* from *anywhere* can^{viii}; the invitation is open to all.

For those who want to be part of the Kingdom, it starts *in here*^{ix} but once the Kingdom has taken root *in here*, it will very quickly express itself *out there*.

To begin the journey towards the Kingdom, one will have to become like a little child^x: as vulnerable and free from rootedness to place or person or possession as it is possible to be.

The Kingdom is also something *here and now*, but at the same time, something which is *not yet* and therefore is to come^{xi}.

It is against such an understanding of ‘the Kingdom’, that we must read the rather strange parable of the rather dodgy steward.

All sorts of commentaries have been written about this story and, almost invariably, commentators tie themselves in endless knots trying to explain it away.

I must admit, that I have never been convinced by such skulduggery with text in order to try and explain why Jesus says something so very odd.

Why he seems to approve of the estate owner’s commendations of his steward’s dishonesty and asserts so forcefully that his followers could do well to take a leaf or two out of the dishonest steward’s book by making friends through the dishonest use of wealth and currying favour.

For me the parable makes perfect sense if it is taken at face value and we reflect carefully on the words which follow the story of the perfidious manager and his master: no slave, says Jesus, can serve two masters and non-one can serve God and wealth^{xii}.

If one reads the parable like this, then it becomes a somewhat ironic cautionary tale, presents the hearer with two clear choices:

The first choice is to follow the way of the world; behave just like everyone else; watch your back; look out for number one.

Such actions will, undoubtedly have their fleeting and fragile rewards, but you'll undoubtedly end up in a similar place again, and the cycle of fraud or theft or lies or deceit will keep on repeating itself over and over again taking you into an ever-darker place and ever-deeper mess.

The second choice is to follow the way of the Kingdom; to know where true riches are to found; to become as a little child, to engage with what really matters with single-minded perseverance; to be part of the Kingdom and know that your reward will be neither fleeting or ephemeral or built on the ever-shifting sands of popularity or what others might think of you, but the solid rock of eternity.

'Look', say Jesus, 'you can't have it both ways. You have to make a choice.' Is to be God way or the world's way. God's Kingdom or the 'kingdom' where money, power, corruption and exploitation rule supreme?'

'Is your life is it going to be God-focused or shaped by acquiring ever more and more wealth or influence or power for its own sake. Are you going to live by deceit and double-dealing, winning friends and influencing people into the bargain, or are going to take up the cross, be my disciple and follow me?'

Jesus asked his hearers to make to a make a binary choice.
And Jesus still asks those who hear him to make a binary
choice.

The steward made the wrong choice and he had his short-
term reward.

May God give us grace to make the right choice with its
reward of everlasting life.

Amen.

ⁱ Luke 13:18-19

ⁱⁱ Luke 4:43)

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 6:20

^{iv} Luke 18:24-25

^v Luke 14:33

^{vi} Luke 9:62

^{vii} Luke 13:28;14:15-23

^{viii} Luke 13:29

^{ix} (Luke 17:21

^x Luke 18:17

^{xi} Luke 19:11 & 21:31

^{xii} Luke 16.13