

Film: *The Car Lot*
Parable: **The Shrewd Manager**
Scripture: **Luke 16:1-13**

Interpreting *The Car Lot*

The Parable of the Shrewd Manager examines some shady business dealings. What better place to explore shady business than at a used car lot. *The Car Lot* examines what people will do to get ahead... even when their backs are against the wall.

After the Trenton gets fired, he thinks on his feet to secure future employment. Adapting this parable to a short film is a difficult task because you don't really know whom to root for. Once again, Jesus creatively invents a new genre of storytelling – a story without a protagonist!

Cultural background

This story, on face value, is quite disturbing. It's almost as if Jesus is condoning under-handedness! This parable has been a problem for interpreters ever since Jesus told it. The primary debate seems to center on the character of the employer.

One school sees him as a noble and generous man, only concerned with what's merciful. In this interpretation – the boss has just cause to relieve the dishonest employee. He even allows him to turn over his responsibilities without losing face. The dishonest man rewards his mercy by using the extra time to endear himself to clients, all the while shamelessly counting on the master's mercy.

Once discovered, the employer has 2 options:

1. Renege on the sweet deals his steward gave out, and look like a goat in the community

Or...

2. Write off the losses as acts of goodwill (good PR), and let the scoundrel experience mercy once again

He chooses the later, and in fact commends the dishonest employee for coming up with such a creative solution

A second school of thought on this parable - sees the employer as just as crooked as the employee. This view takes into account the OT prohibition of usury (charging interest to the needy). The idea here is that the steward can discount the debts down to the original principal by removing the usurious interest charges. In this interpretation - the master cannot say



anything about his steward's discount deals without exposing his own usurious schemes, so he keeps quiet and commends the scoundrel for his creativity ("shrewdness").

Discussion questions

- 1) Of the two schools of thought listed above, which one do you think Jesus was communication? (A merciful manager or a crooked manager)
 - 2) Are we supposed to look at this story as an example of what to do... or what *not* to do?
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Application

Under either interpretation - the point of the parable is that God appreciates human creativity. Not for dishonest purposes- that is more like the "children of this world", but for Kingdom purposes. Anyone can see that this is often true. Worldly garage bands spend hours thinking creatively about how to achieve fame and fortune; business people come up with amazingly shrewd ways to advance their product or career. God appreciates such shrewd and creative approaches - even if they are used towards the wrong ends!



Jesus is calling for "the children of the light" (His followers) to apply themselves in such shrewd and creative ways to the problems facing this broken world. He wants us to use our resources (money, possessions, influence) to creatively advance His cause in the world today. In the OT - Israel was given a mission to be "a light to the Gentiles." In that mission, they had failed miserably. Jesus is scolding their lack of creativity in pursuing that mission. Not only did they lack "shrewdness" in their message to the nations, but they had, in essence, alienated the Gentiles from God. Why? According to this parable - it was a lack of creativity. Can you imagine how rapidly the Kingdom would advance today if the followers of Christ creatively used their resources for God's purposes in the world?

Discussion questions

- 1) How can the Church be more creative in advancing the Kingdom?
 - 2) What is your local church doing to be shrewd managers of God's Kingdom?
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As you reflect on the parable and the film, consider that Jesus told these stories about our everyday lives. He reveals Himself through common experiences and we should be able to find Him in the most unlikely places. Christ "shows up" while we're sitting in front of our computers at work, cooking dinner or driving in traffic. We always like to learn something during the big moments in our lives, but Christ clearly makes the point that learning about His love, His grace and His mercy can be experienced in the most ordinary circumstances of our everyday lives.