

# Jesus Stories V: The One About The Shady Customer Service Manager

Reconnect – August 23, 2009

**Text:** Luke 16:1-9, 13

**Key Thought:** To follow Jesus means to prioritize serving people above money, no matter the cost.

Jesus told this story to his disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a manager handling his affairs. One day a report came that the manager was wasting his employer's money. So the employer called him in and said, 'What's this I hear about you? Get your report in order, because you are going to be fired.' "The manager thought to himself, 'Now what? My boss has fired me. I don't have the strength to dig ditches, and I'm too proud to beg. Ah, I know how to ensure that I'll have plenty of friends who will give me a home when I am fired.' "So he invited each person who owed money to his employer to come and discuss the situation. He asked the first one, 'How much do you owe him?' The man replied, 'I owe him 800 gallons of olive oil.' So the manager told him, 'Take the bill and quickly change it to 400 gallons.' "And how much do you owe my employer?' he asked the next man. 'I owe him 1,000 bushels of wheat,' was the reply. 'Here,' the manager said, 'take the bill and change it to 800 bushels.' "The rich man had to admire the dishonest rascal for being so shrewd. And it is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light. Here's the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home. Luke 16:1-9, NLT

## Intro: Name tags

- **[come out dressed up in my MCS outfit – tie and all – but lacking one important thing**
- putting on the name tag - when you put it on, you become a different person - from a dressed up "man about town" to suddenly, someone who is a servant of others
- You don't work for yourself anymore, your agenda is not your own - you are now an employee and a customer service person

**Q: Who here has worn a name tag before like this one? What did you do in your job?**

**What was your most memorable moment?**

## Customer service:

- Most of us have probably done it at one point in our lives or another - whether in high school, for some extra money on the side, or even as a career...!
- On the plus side, you get this incredible chance to interact with people, and you never know what's going to happen
- And then there's the downside: you get this incredible chance to interact with people, and you never know what's going to happen...!
- Sometimes those of us in customer service dream of getting out – of finding a job that is “customer-free”, where it doesn't matter if we dress up, or we don't have to solve people's problems – and we look at others with different kinds of jobs with a lot of envy
- But interestingly enough, ever since civilization began there have been roles like this – because customers are the ones who make everything go
- Jesus got that - he was blue-collar, a contractor, and probably self-employed or working as part of his family business - and yet, as a contractor, you work for others - it's what you do. So this next story was close to his heart and fully out of his working life
- He's been telling a lot of stories that day – a lot of stories about lost things – a lost coin, a lost sheep, a prodigal son – with the idea behind them that God is always searching for those people who don't have a relationship with Him – He wants desperately to “find” them and nothing gives Him greater joy
- That much is pretty clear – but the next story that Jesus tells is “to his disciples”, even though the crowd is all around Him, and includes some hostile listeners, always looking to catch Him in his words

- And he throws them a curveball – he tells them a story that is the reverse of what they’re expecting – the one that was already read this morning and shown on video as a modern adaptation – and that’s what we’re going to take a closer look at

## **Read Text: Luke 16:1-9 / Explanation**

**Jesus told this story to his disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a manager handling his affairs. One day a report came that the manager was wasting his employer’s money. So the employer called him in and said, ‘What’s this I hear about you? Get your report in order, because you are going to be fired.’**

- If we’re going to understand this story, we’ve got to get it right from the beginning – and that starts with figuring out exactly what the problem is with this customer service manager
- We learn a little further on in the story what his responsibilities are – he deals with the tenant farmers of his wealthy landholder boss – these are all well established customers with large operations, that have potentially been with his family for generations
- And he “handles the affairs” – completely enough that the rich man, the landowner, the boss, has no idea what’s been happening – which was a feature of that culture, putting your complete trust in someone else to do that – until somehow, he hears “a report” that his manager is actually a MIS-manager
- So what was the problem? Well, it wasn’t fraud – otherwise, there would have been some kind of criminal charges, or greater punishment, or penalties
- It seems, instead, that it was just incompetence – that this manager over time has drifted – his priority is supposed to be to represent the landowner, but that has changed over time to just going through the motions without caring, to the benefit of no-one but himself
- Have you ever been there? Where you’re in a job, and either you know it’s going to end soon, so you just stop caring – or you’ve been there too long, and the place has changed you? That’s where the manager is – and he messes up something or other big enough to come to his boss’ attention
- And the boss decides to let him go at the end of the day

**“The manager thought to himself, ‘Now what? My boss has fired me. I don’t have the strength to dig ditches, and I’m too proud to beg. Ah, I know how to ensure that I’ll have plenty of friends who will give me a home when I am fired.’**

- Ever been fired? Some people go through their whole life without that feeling – others of us know it all too well, or we’ve seen it in those we love – the shock, the questions, the “what do I do now?”’s that come thick and fast
- In a rural culture, there aren’t a ton of employment options for a customer service manager – he can’t go down the street to the competition, because it doesn’t work like that – and if word spreads about what’s happened, then he’s going to be blacklisted
- He doesn’t have a trade, so he’s looking at manual labour or worse, begging – “too weak to dig, too proud to beg” – what’s he going to do?
- And then he has an idea: he’s going to figure out a way to “make friends and influence people” on his last day on the job, so that he’ll have job prospects the day after – he now has a plan

**“So he invited each person who owed money to his employer to come and discuss the situation. He asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe him?’ The man replied, ‘I owe him 800 gallons of olive oil.’ So the manager told him, ‘Take the bill and quickly change it to 400 gallons.’ ““And how much do you owe my employer?’ he asked the next man. ‘I owe him 1,000 bushels of wheat,’ was the reply. ‘Here,’ the manager said, ‘take the bill and change it to 800 bushels.’**

- It’s his last day – he calls in the different tenants, who have no idea what’s happened, and starts making deals – and they have no reason to suspect anything is going on, because the manager has the authority to do this, even if he’s never done this before
- They might think he’s acting a little funny, but when there’s a sale, you don’t question too hard – you pretty much just take the deal
- One of the bills he reduces by 50%; the other one he reduces by 20%
- These are some large bills – some pretty big amounts – 800 gallons is a little over 3000 litres, and with olive oil going at around \$8 a litre today, you’re looking at a savings with this deal of about \$12000 – that’s a lot of money then and now
- 1000 bushels of wheat, at a standard moisture, is about 60000 pounds worth, and about 34 acres worth – that’s a pretty big spread – and he takes it down by 20%
- And of course, unsuspecting, they take the deal

**“The rich man had to admire the dishonest rascal for being so shrewd. And it is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light. Here’s the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your earthly possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.**

- Here’s where people disagree on this story – they’re not sure what Jesus is trying to say was good about the whole deal
- It says that the boss had to admire the manager for being so “shrewd” – pure and simple – but people get sidetracked in legality
  - Did the manager just remove his commission, meaning that the rich man suffered no loss in his wheeling and dealing?
  - Or did he actually cost his boss money – in essence, did he rip his boss off right at the end to make some friends for himself?
- I’m not sure – but Jesus isn’t trying to make that point – he’s talking about being “shrewd”
- The word in Greek is *phronomis* – which can have a range of meanings from insight to understanding to clever to shrewd
- It’s not just about smarts – it’s about doing the right thing in advance – “prudence” – which is a word you only ever hear in old George Bush spoofs
- It’s thinking ahead – it’s having foresight and acting on it, so that you help yourself in the end
- Today, it’s what you do when something’s on sale, like frozen chicken breasts, and you buy a bunch of them and stock up your freezer – you save money because of your foresight – or you buy a barbeque at the end of the season instead of at the beginning – foresight again

- Jesus says that the manager had that clever foresight – that he made the right move in advance, to get what he wanted to happen
- And what he wanted to happen, was another job – he wanted to make friends for himself for when his situation changed – and it was about to change very quickly, and he knew that
- Jesus goes on to say that the “world’s people” – in other words, people that aren’t following Jesus, for whatever reason – have more of this quality, this clever foresight, this “shrewdness” – than the people that DO follow him – and he wants to inspire his followers, including his closest ones, to have more of that clever foresight in their lives, especially with their money
- He wants them, and by extension, you and I, to use our “worldly resources” – the tools of our stuff – to make those friendships for ourselves – for eternal benefits – in other words, to introduce more people to Jesus, our boss
- When our situation changes – in other words, when this life is over – that we will have a legacy of serving and giving that will have inspired people all through our lives to turn to God and live that same kind of life
- Ironically, in the story, the end result is that the landowner actually looks good – the “generosity” that the manager shows is seen as an extension of the landowner – and whether he wanted to be that generous or not, the tenants are now even more “in his debt” because socially, he has demonstrated that he is an extremely worthy person – it wound up being win-win
- So how can we follow Jesus’ advice and have the same kind of “win-win” result?

### **“Your money or your life”**

- It’s the age-old question of our lives – money or people – which matters more?
- Jesus says people, every time – but in the confusion of our lives, with all of the different choices we have to make and the needs and wants that we have, it never seems to be that clear
- The manager uses money to make his master (and by extension, himself) look good. We are to do the same, through our generosity (who we spend our money on) and our stewardship (what we spend our money on)
- But in essence, the question is bigger than money – it’s the way that we live our lives with regards to others – it’s actually more of a “customer service” issue

### **Customer Service Training - Bob Farrell – “Give Em The Pickle” (Take care of the customer)**

- So since you have a customer service manager here, let’s do a little bit of basic customer service training – I only wish I had name tags for everyone – wouldn’t that be fun?
- This is actually inspired by our local grocery store Ross’ Independant – when you walk in, they have a TV playing on a loop, and it’s a customer service training video – it’s what they hope to live up to, every time you go there, and it’s what they want us to know is their employee standard
- One day I had some time to kill, so I stood by the tomatoes and started watching – and I realized why they have signs up all over the place with pickles on them – because it was a video by Bob Farrell, who founded Farrell’s restaurants in the States – doing this video he calls “Give Em The Pickle”

- Farrell’s business was starting to grow, when he got a letter from a customer, complaining that they were charged for a side order of pickles when they had always been free previously, and that they were going to stop going to the restaurant as a result of it
- Stung by the criticism, he wrote the client, smoothed things over and then realized: his employees didn’t get it – they didn’t understand the culture he was trying to create – a “service culture”
- Instead of being concerned about this or that, they needed to just “give ‘em the pickle”

### Farrell’s Four Keys To Customer Service

- 1) **Service - Give away pickles – make people happy** – Make serving others your top priority - they’ve made serving others their Number One priority – what’s your pickle – what is that extra special thing you do to make people happy? Find out what the customer wants and make sure they get it – “one of the worst are banks – 8 windows, seven closed, winding lineups, and the pen on the string
- 2) **Attitude** – “how you think about your customer is how you treat them” – you are the face of your company to every customer you have contact with – your customers don’t care about the rest of your life or your problems – you need to put your face on and do what you need to do
- 3) **Consistency** – people come back because they like what happened last time – you need to keep living up to what you’ve been – keep the good stuff coming – and when they don’t get it, they think that things are slipping and things have changed – there is no shortcut to consistency – it’s doing it everyday – “ordinary people doing ordinary things extraordinarily well” (Farrell) – everyone has a part to play, and everything you do ends up in front of the customer
- 4) **Teamwork** – no one can do this alone – “a team is a group of people who go out of their way to make each other look good” (Farrell) – work together to do better, help each other do better – give away the team pickle – “serving others is a noble profession” (Farrell)

When you have problems, have the courage to make things right

What to get across? How do you use your money? What are you spending it on? Who are you spending it on? And which comes first - the who or the what? How much goes outside you/your family? Where does it go, then?

### Key Thought:

**To follow Jesus means to prioritize serving people above money, no matter the cost.**

“No one can serve two masters.

For you will hate one and love the other;

You will be devoted to one and despise the other.

You cannot serve both God and money.”

(Jesus, in Luke 16:13, NLT)

## **Conclusion: Our Boss**

- We don't need to bind our boss - he's the one pushing us - we work for a great boss... perhaps head to Independant and view the Pickle video again and take notes? - Jesus gave away EVERYTHING he had – Philippians 2 – everything and more for US.

## **Response: Why Georgia by John Mayer**