

WHAT A STORY!

This may well be the ***strangest*** story Jesus ever told!
or at least the strangest one we have **in OUR** Bible.

It appears that Jesus is telling us to make a crook,
a real scoundrel.....our role model!

He cheats on his employer. He lies to his business associates.
and yet, says Jesus....

HERE is somebody we really **NEED** to learn from!

How could Jesus do that?????

Just what are WE missing that the people in Jesus' time knew?

How did THEY hear it

and get **ANY** religious authority or spiritual teaching from it?

LET'S TAKE A SECOND (DIFFERENT) LOOK AT THIS STORY:

Richie Rich.....the big man in town.

He's the local millionaire.

Most of the area's economy depends on his assets & doings.

Lots of people work for him.

Many others are renters & sharecroppers on his estate.

With such a big business to run,

Richie Rich decides to hire Debra Director,

With her freshly stamped MBA.

Things go well for many years.

Richie Rich gives Debra Director full responsibility for the business. That way, he can relax more, have more time to get away, travel.

But, Richie Rich is no fool. He still reads the annual reports.

And he smells something suspicious.

So, he does a little investigation.

Debra Director appears to be not quite up front.

Time for Richie Rich to take responsibility again!

So, he calls Debra into his office, shows her the evidence....

& tells her to pack up her office and leave.

Debra knows she's been caught.

She knows she's been wrong. She doesn't protest.

She doesn't try to point fingers or argue her way out of it.

She hangs her head and turns away.

AND HERE IS WHERE THE STORY GETS REALLY INTERESTING.

Now, Richie Rich could have put Debra in jail.....

Jesus tells other stories like **THAT!**

BUT HE DOESN'T!

And he could have announced loudly Debra's guilt...

Making sure she didn't get work around **THERE** again.

BUT HE DOESN'T DO THAT EITHER!

No, Richie Rich seems to have some heart....

He keeps the matter quiet,

So that Debra Director can bow out gracefully.

DEBRA'S NO LONGER MANAGING HIS ESTATE.

But apparently, only Richie Rich & Debra know **THAT**.

Because it gives Debra time to play her last hand of cards.

Instead of packing, she runs quickly to other people

who are in significant debt to Richie Rich.

THEY'VE done business for years with Debra Director.

and they have **NO** idea that she's been fired.'

So, when she comes to their houses,
they **ASSUME** that she's still in charge of Richie's estate.

"Quick!" Debra Director says. "Where is your I.O.U. with my boss?
Let's tear it up and rewrite it for $\frac{1}{2}$ the amount."

SO THEY DO IT.

IT ALL HAPPENS VERY QUICKLY.

The contract for 800 gallons of olive oil is cut in half,

The bill for 1000 bushels of wheat is reduced by 200.

Actually, the cuts in our gospel story each have about
the same monetary value in the day: roughly 500 denarii.

It gives us the idea that Debra WAS acting in haste.

She had no time to figure out percentages or calculate market trends!
She just lopped off about 500 denarii from each bill.

AND THE DEED WAS DONE!

Now, as Jesus says, it doesn't take long
for Richie Rich to find out what happened.
After all, this kind of news spreads FAST!

AND, the word on the street is that he's become quite the **HERO!**
People are shouting thank yous & praise for Richie Rich!
"WHAT A GENEROUS MAN HE IS!!!"

So, what does Richie do? What **CAN** he do?!

Actually, he has at least 2 options: either....

He can tell on Director Debra,
and take away the cuts Debra made of their bills;

or he can keep quiet about this whole mess,
and let things stand as they are.

If he does the first, he really stands to **LOSE FACE**.
None of the people have grumbled much about the bills before.
After all, they **WERE LAWFUL and binding**.

But now, they've seen a moment of **GRACE!!**
& even though they weren't expecting it.....
they've already begun to live out its freedoms and promises.

SO, if Mr. Rich takes away the blessing they've just received,
he'll look **STINGY & GREEDY**.
It'll seem like he cares **more for his \$\$\$** than for his people.

AND BESIDES ALL THAT,
Debra Director will come out smelling like a **ROSE!**
After all, she wasn't cheating herself....
only looking out after the welfare of the debtors.
She can't be a **BAD** person.....
not when she works for the good of the community.
SO, SHE'LL have a **WELCOME** in every home!
(which is **just what she** wanted in the first place!)

BUT, if Richie Rich wants to keep the matter **QUIET**,
a whole different scenario will unfold!.

The people of the community will continue to praise him
for his **GENEROSITY**,
and the future will be very **WELCOMING**.

AND THAT'S THE PICTURE JESUS LEAVES WITH US.

Richie Rich surrounded by the praise of his community.
At his side is Debra Director, grinning at the success of her scheme.
Richie Rich rejoicing at the **GOOD** joke that's been played.

Debra gained lots of friends.
Richie Rich rose in the esteem of the community.
EVERYONE feels **GOOD** and the whole town celebrates!
A REAL WIN – WIN SITUATION!

So, what is Jesus' point? After all, this is a parable.
What in the world is he trying to say to his disciples?
I don't think he's telling us to be dishonest.
Jesus doesn't say to the Steward, "Go and do likewise!"

If there **IS** one thing that holds this story together,
one idea around which all the details hinge,
It **HAS TO BE** the **GENEROSITY** of the rich man.

THINK OF IT!
It was the generous nature of Richie Rich
that made it possible for Debra to do what she did!
His **GENEROSITY** gave her time to put her affairs in order,
rather than publicly denounce her or send her to jail.

The **GENEROUS** nature of the rich man
was the **real KEY** to the scheme:
The debtors hear Debra reduce their debts in **THEIR** favor,
& they said, "Yeah! That Mr. Rich **IS** a **GENEROUS** person!
And we are left with the image of the people's cries of delight.

The main point of Jesus' story is **NOT** to teach us to be dishonest,
in order to make bucks, or to get something for ourselves.
The main point IS THIS:

Do you know of the great generosity of God?
Does the world around you see in **YOUR** actions the **GOODNESS OF GOD?**

In Jesus' story or parable, the rich man commends the Steward
for making good use of his generosity,
not to line his own pockets....
but to spread the blessings of his boss throughout the community!

Jesus invites his followers to **RECOGNIZE**
the great **GENEROSITY** of God...
and to **USE** that recognition to spread God's blessings around.

The Steward **KNEW** that showing the **GENEROSITY** of his boss
was the only way
he could survive the pressure of **HIS** situation.

We too, "the people of the light " to whom Jesus refers,
--are to be wise enough to know
that if we hope to survive
pressures of the times in which we live...
our only hope is living the **GENEROSITY OF GOD.**

And only those who know God's **GREAT GENEROSITY**
become generous themselves...
because, God knows, it is often **NOT our FIRST** reaction to pressure!

The real character of our faith is not seen and heard **PRIMARILY**
by how many time s we go to church or march in parades;
or by the hymns or anthems we sing;
or by the prayers we pray or the pledges we say,
or by the confessions we make: publicly or privately.

The **REAL** character of our faith is in the level of our generosity.
One person put it this way:
“If you want to know the quality of a person’s heart,
check it in the mirror of their checkbook.”

If we are greedy in little ways,
we’ll be tiny in the dimensions of our souls.
Does our **GENEROSITY** keep time with God’s heart?

It’s like a character in Roland Pertwee’s short story,
“**THE VOICE THAT SAID GOOD NIGHT.**”
In that story, Philip Gaylor is found dead in his chair on morning.
Someone twisted his neck and broke it. **BUT WHO?!**

Could have been anyone, say Charles Chrichton (Cry – ton)
to the investigating officer.
“After all,’ he said, “Gaylor was the kind of beast
who kept his soul in his trouser’s pocket...
along with his other small change.
THE MAN IS SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT!

I don’t know about you, but as I think of my own checkbook...
I feel personally indicted by this parable.
I may not be considered monetarily rich by many people,
but wealth is such a relative thing, isn’t it?

I am blessed with material things....compared with many around me.
I wonder:
Do I really reflect the generous nature of God in **MY** generosity?

I wonder at 3 a.m.,
especially at this difficult time of national & international crisis,
when many people are questioning

our nation's place in our global world,
and as citizens of the United States of America.

We can't deny we have **SO MUCH....**

like that rich man...**POWER & MONEY & RESOURCES.**

And I wonder, "What does it mean to live in a country
That makes up about **7-11%** of the world's population,
Yet consumes about **44%** of that world's resources?"

In God's accounting, **UNLIKE OURS,**
GENEROSITY seems to be what balances the books.

What would our world be like...
IF, with all our faults and imperfections...
We were to use **OUR POWER** to relieve debt,
and our **POWER AND INFLUENCE** to befriend those in need?

This is a **GOOD TIME** to take a **FRESH LOOK**
at Jesus' parable of the rich man's steward.

DO WE show forth the extravagant generosity of God?
Jesus knew the extravagance of God's grace.....
AFTER ALL, HE WAS A PART OF IT!!!
ARE WE? Amen.