

The Dishonest Servant

Once there was a king. He was king of a very rich and powerful country and, because it was such a large country to look after, the king had lots of servants and officials to do his work for him.

He had servants to look after his clothes, his palaces and castles, his horses and dogs, his food, and, because he had so much of it, his money as well.

The king had a very nice life. He had nothing to worry about and he enjoyed every day. But he could only enjoy his life because he thought that he could trust his servants.

One day though the king decided to check up on his money. He called all his servants and all his bankers together and asked them to tell him what they had been doing with his money. Some had built great roads for the people to travel on; the king was very pleased. Some had built great waterways so that boats could travel all around his kingdom; the king was very pleased. Some had built a great port so that ships could visit his kingdom from all over the world; the king was very pleased. But one servant seemed to have done nothing, nothing at all. He hadn't built or bought anything, but somehow he had spent 10,000 talents, about £100,000,000.

"Well? What have you done with my money?" asked the king. But the servant couldn't tell him. He went very red, very red indeed.

The king got very angry with the servant. He stood up to his full height and shouted: "Send him to prison and never let him out!" But the servant fell to the floor and said: "Oh please your majesty don't do that. I know I've wasted your money. I know I've been stupid and dishonest. But what about my family, my wife and all my children. I love them and I can't be separated from them!"

The king thought. He had a family too and he knew that it would be a terrible thing indeed to be separated from his wife and children. The king felt very sorry for the servant so he said: "Oh all right! I will let you go. But you must never ever waste my money again!"

"Oh thank you thank you!" said the servant as he backed out of the throne room almost scraping his nose on the floor as he went.

But while he was walking home the dishonest servant saw another of the king's servants who owed the dishonest servant 100 denari, about £100. When he saw him he ran up to him, grabbed the man by the neck and started to strangle him saying: "Pay me what you own me you scoundrel or I'll have you thrown into prison!"

"I can't!" said the servant. "I have no money!"

"Then to prison you go!" shouted the dishonest servant, "and your wife and family too!" And he had them all thrown into prison.

When news of what had happened got out, someone went and told the king. The king could hardly believe his ears. "What!" he said, "I let him off £100,000,000, and he would not let this other fellow off even £100? Bring him here immediately. The guards went off and arrested the dishonest servant. They dragged him to the king.

"What's this I hear?" asked the king in his most angry voice.

The dishonest servant was speechless.

"Well!" said the king, "I've changed my mind. You will go to prison until you have paid every last penny of your 10,000 talents! Take him away."

And with that the guards dragged the dishonest servant off to prison and let the other man and his family go free.

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