

Jesus Was First a Businessman

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As footsteps approached, the twenty-eight year old man looked up from the cluttered workbench. His dark beard and long hair were matted by perspiration mixed with sawdust. Wet sweat rings outlined his armpits on his well-worn tunic. He laid the chisel and mallet down and stood up, wiping his hands together.

“Shalom, may I help you?” he said.

“Shalom,” said the middle-aged man with ringlets in his gray beard. Deep furrows etched his forehead. His off-white cloak and brown leather sandals were covered with dust from the road that he had just traveled on.

“My wife says we need a new dining table. And you know how women are, right?” the man said with a wink. “Some of our neighbors have recommended you and your workmanship.” The man folded his arms across his barrel-shaped chest, readying himself for whatever negotiations awaited him. Like most Galilean businessmen, he wanted the best deal.

The carpenter’s bronze-colored face blushed slightly at the compliment. There was a genuine humility about him that people liked. He grinned at the man.

“That’s nice of your friends. However, to be completely honest, whatever skills I may possess are the result of being taught by the best carpenter in all of Galilee – Joseph, my dad.”

“Oh yes, I should have known,” the man said without moving his arms from their set position on his chest. “You’re the son of Joseph, huh? Who hasn’t heard of his woodworking skills?”

Then, in a loud whisper, he leaned forward and asked, “What do you think the table will cost me? And remember I have three sons and their families living with me. Oye! You can’t believe how much they eat?”

The young carpenter nodded. “Hmm! Let me think for a few minutes.”

The carpenter looked around the shop. He turned and walked to the back of the room, pulling out some boards from a large pile and checking each of them. After a few minutes, he nodded to himself as if he had it all figured out. Then, he returned to the man.

“If you want the table made out of fir, it will cost fifteen shekels. Oak will be five shekels more. The choice is up to you,” the carpenter said with his eyebrows arched in anticipation of a sharp response from the buyer.

The man unfolded his arms. His shocked expression looked as though a sharp sword had pierced his heart. He gasped, and pounded his chest with both fists. “Your price is much higher than I could have ever imagined. Fifteen shekels – how outrageous! I just can’t believe it!”

He turned around and began stomping away. Before he reached the shop’s entrance, he stopped and looked back. “I’m curious. Do you offer discounts to your more impoverished buyers – people like me?”

The carpenter sighed. “Okay. Let me think,” he said, rubbing his jaw with his hand. “If you pay cash today, I can do it for thirteen shekels. The table will be done in two weeks.”

The man stood like a statue. “I had a price more like eleven shekels in mind,” the man said in a clipped voice. Then he added, “And not one shekel more.”

The carpenter shrugged his shoulders and raised his arms in surrender. “Okay, you win,” he said, shaking his head slowly back and forth. “I have some expenses coming up in a few days. This is my final offer: twelve shekels and it will be ready for you in ten days. Take it or leave it.”

The man walked toward the carpenter. “Though eleven shekels is a very fair price, I’m going to give in and pay your outrageous price of twelve shekels.”

The buyer stretched his right hand out and shook the hand of the young carpenter named Jesus.¹ As he did, he felt the calluses and strength in his hand.

¹ Mark 6:3