

LUKE 16

TWO MORE PARABLES

The parable of the unrighteous steward (verses 1-13) is often regarded as the most puzzling of all the parables of our Lord. It seems to picture a man who robbed his master, but still received his master's praise, and then was pointed to by Jesus as an example for His followers! Furthermore, it might almost be understood to teach us that a place in heaven can be purchased with money. But a more careful reading will reveal that praise was not bestowed upon this servant for his dishonesty; but rather, for his prudence and foresight. And diligent study will show us that our Lord does desire His followers to imitate these good qualities, even though this servant was a bad man overall. Moreover, we may also learn here that although we do not earn a place in the heavenly Kingdom by our money, yet it is possible to use wealth (if we have been blessed with it) in such a generous manner that it will secure endless satisfaction and joy.

The Savior tells the story of a steward, or a trustee, who was in charge of the property of a rich landowner. But reports had reached the ears of this man's master, and they were not good ones; for they spoke of the servant's extravagance and dishonesty. An account was demanded, and he was certain to lose his position. However, before he was turned out of his office, he seized on an opportunity to use the wealth which was entrusted to him in such a manner as to secure friends, who would provide a home for him when his stewardship had been lost. Truly, he was guilty of fraud, for he reduced the debts of those who owed money to his master. He was using money that was not his own for his future personal benefit. It would be well if the children of light would learn a few things from the people of this world, and pursue their heavenly objective even more earnestly than the worldlings pursue theirs!

What is the real motive which inspires stewards to be faithful in their responsibilities? It is love! The problem with this dishonest servant was that he was disloyal to his master, and he was really seeking to serve himself. But the person who truly loves his Lord will be faithful in the use of that which is entrusted to him. The danger of stewards is that of attempting to have a divided allegiance; but it is common sense to know that "no servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Between this parable and the next, Luke records a number of Jesus' sayings (verses 14-18) which seem to have been a kind of introduction to the second of these parables. They contain a rebuke of the Pharisees for their besetting sin of greed and covetousness, as well as a statement of the unfailing authority

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *The parable of the unjust steward – verses 1-13*
- ❖ *Christ reproves the hypocrisy of the covetous Pharisees – verses 14-18*
- ❖ *The parable of the rich man and Lazarus – verses 19-31*

of the Law – the letter of which, the Pharisees strictly observed; but by the spirit of which, they were condemned. These Pharisees ridiculed our Lord for teaching the absolute necessity of generosity and benevolence, and the unselfish use of this world's goods (verse 14). Jesus replied that while His enemies might receive the approval of men, God read their hearts; and many who receive human praise are nothing but abominable in the sight of the Lord. He also stated that although the Gospel-message does differ from the Law, and even though many were eagerly accepting its blessed privileges; yet it did not set aside the Law, but only showed how its demands could be met. When Jesus stated that “one tittle of the law” could not fall, He meant that the slightest requirement of the moral Law was and is still sacred and abiding. He illustrated these truths by a reference to the Seventh Commandment, thereby reminding the Pharisees that the Law shall abide and remain sacred, even when legalists – who observe its letter, but not its spirit – shall be condemned.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (verses 19-31), Jesus by no means taught that it is sinful to be rich, nor did He teach that all poor persons are saved. But He did mean to show the solemn peril of the selfish use of this world's possessions. The parable not only shows the contrast between these two men in



this present life, but it also reveals the even greater contrast in the life that is to come. Although the picture is not to be interpreted with ridiculous literalness, it does contain a serious warning; and behind its figures of speech, there are solemn realities. It does indicate the remorse and the anguish which shall be experienced forever by those who, upon earth, made only a selfish and heartless use of their possessions and position and opportunities. Herein Jesus was especially warning those who scrupulously observe the literal precepts of the law, and yet lead lives of selfish luxury and indulgence.

When the rich man was in hell, he requested that a special warning might be sent to his brethren. But the reply of Abraham is very significant: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead.” This was an answer specifically directed against the Pharisees – who were continually demanding that Jesus should give them some striking sign, by which they claimed that they would recognize His Divine mission. Here our Lord shows that a striking miracle will never convince those whose hearts are not right with God in the first place. Indeed, when our Lord Jesus Himself *did* rise from the dead, it did not change the minds of those who were dead-set against Him before His death. May the Lord grant us grace that we may not be included in the number of such unbelieving persons!

Lord, may Your grace may work faith in our hearts; for without that, no miracle or extraordinary event will be of any use to us – not even Jesus' resurrection! Amen.