



In this study, we will continue to analyze the great and vital parables only found in Luke.

The parable of the unjust steward

The account says, "He also said to His disciples: 'There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?"

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

"Now the Pharisees, *who were lovers of money*, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is

pressing into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail" (Luke 16:1-17).

This parable reveals several truths. (1) In God's Church, He would not call "many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble...But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

In other words, God would hardly call any great bankers, businessmen, scientists, politicians or other persons with great abilities. The majority of them would be too full of themselves and busy accumulating money and fame. If He called them, they would boast they were called because of their great talents, not because of God's mercy. So He just lets them remain in the ways of this world where they can focus on their worldly success—but not on true spiritual success before God.

Since Christ knew this would be the case, those He would train as leaders of the greatest Work on earth, then as now, would be simple men and women with ordinary traits and talents. In that day, most God called were fishermen, a job not highly looked upon. But with the help of God's spirit in them, they would have to hone and perfect those God-given abilities to invest wisely the funds given to them to administer. Money is not intrinsically evil, for it can be used either for good or for bad, but the *lust* of it leads to sin (1 Tim. 6:10). So those in charge of God's wealth must avoid becoming greedy, spendthrift, or selfish, for as Jesus points out, you can't serve "two masters." This means you shouldn't set as a priority the making of money (material wealth) over following God's way (and of acquiring spiritual wealth). Each thing has to be placed in its proper order.

So if we are faithful administrators of our money—in our home, personal lives, and to the Church--then we are showing God He can trust us and can give us responsibilities now and much more

in His coming kingdom that deals with a lot more wealth (Luke 16:10; Mt. 25:21).

A good example of this is King David, who was a simple shepherd, but God used him powerfully to become a faithful administrator over all of God's goods in Israel and he will be over the 12 tribes of Israel in the Millennium (Ez. 37:25). God said he was "a man after my own heart, who will do *all* my will" (Acts 13:22). He promoted the true faith, supported the Levites, established great religious choirs to praise God, wrote over a hundred psalms and provided the means to build God's temple. He wasn't by any means perfect and made some very serious sins, but during his life he strove to faithfully follow God's way of life. Likewise, Christ wants all of us to wisely use the world's "unrighteous mammon" (based on this society's false values and a monetary system which often leads to greed and neglect of God's things), so when He returns, He can trust us to administer the true wealth of an economic system based on His righteous standards.

(2) How can we "make friends" with the unrighteous mammon of the world so we can be received "in an everlasting home" – God's kingdom? It is by being a light to the world and by the way we use and invest our money toward them (Mt. 5:16). By tithing and giving offerings to the Church, we are investing in preaching the Gospel and feeding the flock, so all those funds help people be called, be fed and become our spiritual brethren, our true "friends."

(3) It is vital to also understand the phrase here, "when you fail", which means, *when you die*. As *Vine's Expository Dictionary* explains, "The term *ekleipo* means to leave off, cease, fail; it is said of the cessation of earthly life, Luke 16:9" (p. 68).

So after our death and when we are resurrected, those persons who became converted thanks to our efforts (by our examples, tithes and offerings) will honor us (1 P. 2:12). We also owe much to others for being here. So in the first resurrection, we will all embrace each other.

The Believer's Bible Commentary adds, "The following verses show that the steward was not at all commended for his crookedness, but rather for his foresight. He had acted prudently. He looked to the future, and made provision for it. He sacrificed present gain for future reward. In applying this to

our own lives, we must be very clear on this point, however; the future of the child of God is not on this earth but in [the kingdom of God]. Just as the steward took steps to insure that he would have friends during his retirement here...so the Christian should use his Master's goods in such a way as to insure a welcoming party when he [enters the kingdom of God]. The Lord said, 'The sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.' This means that ungodly, unregenerate men show more wisdom in providing for their future in this world than true believers show in laying up treasures in heaven. We should make friends for ourselves by means of unrighteous mammon. That is, we should use money and other material things in such a way as to [help conversions] for Christ and thus form friendships that will endure throughout eternity."

Since Pharisees administered great wealth from religion (properties, inheritances and fees) and became greedy persons, when they heard this parable, they ridiculed Him. They considered Christ and His disciples to be a band of nobodies, without money or influence. Yet before God they certainly were the important ones, while the Pharisees, because of their self-righteousness and greediness, were the real spiritual failures (see also Mt. 21:31). *The Believer's Bible Commentary* adds, "The Pharisees misunderstood the blessings of God's covenant. They apparently assumed that a person's wealth was God's blessing in return for his righteous conduct. They completely neglected the fact that many righteous people in the Old [and New] Testaments lacked material things, while many unrighteous people had plenty."

Parable of Lazarus and the rich man

The next parable says, "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom."

The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'

"Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead'" (Luke 16:19-31). Unfortunately, this is one of the least understood of all the parables given by Jesus. Yet, that was not the case in his day since no believing Jew accepted the pagan teaching of the immortality of the soul.

First of all, Christ is still dealing with Pharisaic greediness just mentioned. What He was emphasizing here was the rich man's lack of compassion for the poor while constantly selfishly feasting. He was so wealthy he could afford hosting banquets for his friends every day, which would cost a fortune. He was aware of the poor beggar outside his house just desiring to eat the crumbs they carelessly dropped on the floor. Yet, he never thought of even giving the beggar some of this garbage! This was the point of jadedness the rich man's conscience had become! His conscience was seared—and that was the way he lived and finally died.

So Christ was warning the Pharisees, many of them so rich and influential, that they were coming close to searing their consciences by being so greedy and were near committing the unpardonable sin—by a hardening and searing of the conscience to the point where there is no longer the possibility of repentance (1 Tim. 4:2). According to God's judgment, the rich man had reached this point and so ended up in what the Bible calls "the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:29), which leads to "the second death" (Rev. 20:14-15). We call this time the

"third resurrection" to contrast it from the first (Rev. 20:6) and the second ones (Rev. 20:5, 11-12).

Now the beggar Lazarus died and in his resurrection, did make it into the kingdom of God. One way the Bible describes this is being "in the bosom of Abraham" since it means inheriting the promises of Abraham—of entering God's kingdom. By the description given, Lazarus, as a poor beggar would surely be illiterate and wasn't part of the first resurrection. But he certainly qualified for being resurrected into the second resurrection. There, he received God's truths and was converted and written in the Book of Life. So he became part of the resurrected saints. They will then watch the judgment of the third resurrection, where all the incorrigibly wicked will be judged and thrown into the lake of fire. The whole earth will then be purified by that fire and all of man's sins will be purged from the earth (2 P. 3:7, 12). Then will be fulfilled what is mentioned in Malachi 4:1-3, "For ...the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the Lord of hosts. That will leave them neither root nor branch. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this," says the Lord of hosts."

This is why the rich man, looking at that lake of fire, only asked Lazarus to dip his finger in some water so he could moisten the rich man's lips. This is typical of what occurs to a man about to die when his saliva dries up due to fright.

The rich man asks if he can go back to warn his brothers about what their destiny can be if they follow his wrong example. It is clear he doesn't understand all that is going on in God's plan. He has been judged and sentenced to eternal death. The separation between the righteous "sheep" and the wicked "goats" is taking place (Mt. 25:31-33).

It is apparent from this parable that God, having perfect love, doesn't want to rub it in what the rich man will ultimately miss—eternal life and fellowship with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and all the resurrected saints in the coming beautification of the universe. The Bible just succinctly describes the rich man's fate, "This is the second death. And anyone not found in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14-15). It is a parable worth meditating upon.