

53. Jesus Taught About the Unjust Steward

In our last three topics, we saw that we want to teach our physical and spiritual children that there is great joy in heaven over even one sinner that repents. Jesus made it very clear to the tax collectors and sinners that He would give them every opportunity to repent and receive forgiveness of sins. At the same time, the scribes and Pharisees showed by their attitudes that they rejected the tax collectors and sinners. In our topic today, we are going to see that as they continued to travel toward Jerusalem Jesus taught His disciples about an unjust steward.

One day we see that Jesus talked to His disciples about a steward who had been an unfaithful worker for his master. Luke 16:1-2 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.”’” The word translated “steward” means *the manager of the finances of a rich man or the manager of a household*. It can also talk about Christians being stewards of the mysteries of God. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 says, “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” However, in this case we see that this steward was managing the finances of a rich man.

We see that the most important responsibility of a steward was that the steward be found faithful. The word translated “he had wasted” means *to scatter*. It is the same word that was used of the younger son in the previous chapter. Luke 15:13 says, “And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.” In this verse, the younger son had wasted all of his possessions with sinful living. In contrast, the steward had wasted the money or possessions of his master by fraud or by mismanagement. When the rich man heard the report about the steward, he immediately called him and accused him of scattering his goods. He told the steward to prepare a report of his stewardship because he was no longer going to be the steward.

We see that the steward immediately made a decision when he was told that he would no longer be the steward. Luke 16:3-7 says, “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.”” The steward decided that in the short time he had left, he was going to prepare for his future on this earth. However, he did not prepare for eternity.

The steward said that he could not dig. By this, he meant that he did not know how to do physical work out in the fields. He also said that he could not stand the shame of trying to provide for himself by begging. As a result, he decided to act in such a way that the debtors of his master

would be indebted to him. He immediately began calling every one of the people who owed his master money or goods. He asked each debtor the same basic question. That question was, “How much do you owe my master?” Then, he told each debtor that they were to change the bills to a much smaller amount than they owed his master. Every debtor was eager to receive a decrease in their bill.

The first debtor owed the master a hundred measures of oil. This would have been oil that was used for cooking. A measure was more than nine gallons of oil. The first person was told to quickly write down fifty measures of oil instead of one hundred measures. That meant that his debt was immediately reduced by over 450 gallons of oil. The fact that the steward had the man change his own bill meant that the man realized this was not the instruction of the master. Both the steward and the debtors knew they were cheating the master by changing the bill. In this way, the steward knew they would invite him to stay in their houses, because they were also being dishonest and the steward knew that they were in agreement with him to cheat and deceive the master.

The steward did this same thing with each of the debtors of his master. Another debtor said that he owed a hundred measures of wheat. A measure of wheat was about 14 bushels. The steward told the debtor to write down 80 bushels. The steward continued to make a large decrease in the debt of each of the people who owed goods to his master. We also see the goal of the steward. Since each of these people had agreed to help deceive the master of the steward, they now owed a debt to the steward. His plan was to make certain that they would invite him to stay in their various homes when he no longer was a steward.

The master heard what the steward had done. Luke 16:8-9 says, “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.” The master actually praised the steward when he heard what he had done. This was not a compliment for stealing the goods of the master. Instead, the master was saying, “You were more shrewd than I was, so you are the one who won.”

The word translated “more shrewd” *means to be wise and can be used in either a good or a sinful way*. Romans 12:16 says, “Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.” 1 Corinthians 10:12-15 warns about being wise in our own conceits. Those verses say, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.” The person who is wise in his own opinion is actually setting himself up for a fall and finally for eternal judgment. That is what we see happened with this steward.

Jesus said that the people of this world are shrewder in their ways than the sons of light. Because

of their own opinions, they can easily deceive others in this world. However, Jesus went on to warn that such shrewdness will have no value for eternity. The word translated “mammon” means *the riches of this world*. Those who make friends in the world to gain unrighteous riches are thinking only of this world and are not preparing for eternity. Those evil friends who help them gain their unrighteous riches will together end up experiencing eternal judgment. This steward used the money of his master to buy friends for this world. Together, they can look forward to eternal judgment.

Jesus had just explained to the disciples the consequences of evil living on this earth. Then, Jesus told the disciples that He had given them this lesson so they could learn to be faithful stewards, instead of unfaithful stewards. Luke 16:10-12 says, “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?” Just as there are consequences for sinful living, there are blessings for godly living.

Jesus told the disciples that those who make the choice to be faithful in the smallest things will also be faithful in the big things. In the same way, the one who is unjust in the smallest things will also be unjust in the big things. The word translated “unjust” means *to be deceitful or to deal fraudulently with others*. Jesus had just illustrated how the unjust steward had been unjust by the way that he had provided for himself after he lost his job as the steward. Jesus had also shown that there were eternal consequences.

Jesus wanted the disciples to become faithful stewards of the message that He was giving to them. Jesus has that same desire for each Christian today. Jesus calls for us to lay up our treasures in heaven. Matthew 6:19-21 says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The steward had prepared treasure for this earth. Jesus calls for us to seek the eternal treasures that are given to those who are faithful.

Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:10-11, “For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of evil*, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” Here, we see that Paul told Timothy that greed can cause people to stray from the faith. Instead, Paul urged Timothy to pursue the things that bring eternal rewards. In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that there will be eternal blessings in their lives if they make the choice to pursue the things that will bring eternal blessings and rewards. These are the things that last. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to be good stewards of all that the Lord gives to them.