

54. Jesus Taught About the Danger of Greed

We saw in our last topic that we want to help our physical and spiritual children gain a full understanding of the eternal consequences that faced the unjust steward. He prepared to live the rest of his life on this earth but he made no preparation for eternity. As a result, he faced eternal judgment. The Pharisees were listening as Jesus spoke these things to His disciples. In our topic today, we are going to see how the Pharisees reacted to the words that Jesus had just spoken.

Jesus wanted to help His disciples realize that their choices really showed what was in their hearts. Every person has to choose who he or she will serve. Then, Jesus said in Luke 16:13, “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.” We saw in the last topic that the word translated “mammon” means *earthly riches*. That is why Luke 16:11-12 says, “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?” Here, we see that Jesus made it clear that people must be faithful in the way that they handle the riches of this world if they want God to entrust them with true riches.

Jesus wanted each of His disciples to be faithful with the earthly riches that God entrusted to them, because Jesus said that was the only way that they could be entrusted with true riches. The same is true for us in our lives today. As Christians, we are stewards of the earthly possessions that Jesus gives to us. Here, Jesus said that the way we manage these earthly things will determine how many things of eternal value the Lord will entrust to us. That is why Jesus said that it is impossible for any servant to serve two masters. The word translated “serve” means *to be a slave*. In this case, the two masters are either God or earthly riches.

First, we see we will either love God or love riches. The word translated “hate” means *to detest or to pursue with hatred*. The word translated “love” is the word that is used to speak of God’s love for us. It means to be well-pleased with, to be contented or to love dearly. If we love earthly riches, we will detest God. In contrast, if we love God, we will not be concerned about accumulating earthly riches. Instead, we will be faithful stewards and use that money wisely to bring glory to God. Second, we see that we will either be loyal to God or we will be loyal to earthly riches. The word translated “loyal” means *to hold to something or someone firmly*. The word translated “despise” means *to think little or nothing of*. If we hold firmly to riches, we will think little or nothing of God. In contrast, if we hold firmly to God, we will be content with whatever God gives us.

When Jesus said these words, He received an immediate reaction from the Pharisees. Luke 16:14-15 says, “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 Pharisees had been listening as Jesus taught His disciples. However, the Pharisees were lovers of money. Many of the Pharisees taught that a person could love both money and God. In fact, they thought that earthly riches showed that God was blessing them. The Pharisees

thought that rich people were favored by God.

Suddenly, they heard what Jesus said about riches and they derided Him. The word translated “derided” means *to scoff, to sneer or to turn up the nose at*. In fact, the only other place where we see this word used in the New Testament is in Luke 23:35 where we read, “And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.’” Here, the word is translated “sneered” and spoke about the rulers and people as they mocked Jesus as He hung on the cross. The Pharisees were also mocking Jesus because of what He had just said about earthly riches.

That is why Jesus told the Pharisees, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.” Here, we see that the Pharisees wanted the rest of the people to think that they were right that God showed His blessing by giving riches. They did not want to admit that part of their money was gained through sin. In Matthew 23:14, Jesus said, “‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.’” The Pharisees would try to cover the fact that they were cheating widows by making long prayers for those widows. God said in 1 Samuel 16:7, “‘But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For *the Lord does not see as man sees*; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’” Jesus made it clear that God knew the hearts of these Pharisees.

The word translated “is highly esteemed” means *exalted on high or higher than*. Hebrews 7:26 says, “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens*.” In Hebrews, this verse says that Jesus has become higher than the heavens. In the minds of the Pharisees, their riches had become highly exalted. In contrast, Jesus said that their riches had become an abomination in the sight of God. The word translated “abomination” means *a foul or detestable thing that is a part of idolatry*. This word is used to describe the image that the antichrist will set up in the temple during the time of the tribulation. Matthew 24:15 says, “‘Therefore when you see the “*abomination of desolation*,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place’ (whoever reads, let him understand).” Mark 13:14 says almost exactly the same thing. Jesus here showed that the riches that the Pharisees highly valued had actually become the idol that they were worshiping.

Jesus went on to point out the fact that the law and the prophets were completing their purpose. Luke 16:16-18 says, “‘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. Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.’”

The Old Testament law and the prophets were necessary until the coming of Jesus. Matthew 5:17-18 says, “‘Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.’” Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets because He was the One that was promised throughout the Old Testament. John was the one who

introduced Jesus. In his introduction in Matthew 3:11, John said, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” The Pharisees were unwilling to recognize that Jesus is God who can baptize with the Holy Spirit.

In contrast, the tax collectors and sinners were pressing into the kingdom of God. Matthew 11:11-12 says, “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.” The tax collectors and sinners were eager to hear and follow Jesus. Luke 15:1 says, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.” God had promised through Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:13, “And you will seek *Me* and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” The sinners were searching for Jesus while the Pharisees were rejecting Him.

Jesus came to fulfill the Law. Galatians 3:24-25 says, “Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” The Law has a very important purpose. That purpose is to convict people of their sin and bring them to Jesus so that they can be justified by faith. Once a person comes to Jesus by faith, Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Here, we see that the Law has completed its purpose and we are now given the liberty to serve one another in love.

Jesus then used one of the laws to illustrate what it meant to fulfill the Law by serving one another in love. The Pharisees had tried to avoid the Law by their use of divorce. Matthew 19:3 says, “The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?’” Then, Matthew 19:7-8 says, “They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’ He said to them, ‘Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.’” The Pharisees had rejected the commandment by saying that Moses commanded divorce. They made that the command because of the hardness of their hearts. Jesus fulfilled the Law and gives Christians the power to carry out the plan that God had for marriage in Genesis 2:24 as they learn to serve one another in love. We want to show our physical and spiritual children how we fulfill the Law not by using our liberty as an occasion to serve the flesh but by showing that the Law is fulfilled by the fact that we are one flesh in Christ and serve our partner in love. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to be led by the love of Jesus in your own life.