

THE UNJUST STEWARD

– *MAY 10.* – *LUKE 16:1-13.* –

**"He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much;
and he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous in much."
– V.10.**

BECAUSE the Pharisees were the leading exponents of the Law, Jesus pointed many of His parables against them, while He comparatively ignored the irreligious Jews – the Sadducees, who made no profession of faith. Today's lesson is in line with this. This parable was spoken as a rebuke to the spirit of the Pharisees, who bound heavy burdens upon others, but shirked them themselves, while pretending hearty obedience to the Law.

In olden times, more than now, it was the custom for rich men to appoint stewards. Such a steward had as absolute control of his master's goods as had the master himself; he had, as it were, the power of attorney. Some stewards were faithful; others extravagant. The one mentioned in our Lord's parable was extravagant, unsatisfactory. His master had concluded to dispense with his services, and had asked him to render up his accounts.

On his books were the accounts of certain debtors who apparently were left with no chance of being able to meet their obligations. The steward concluded that he would scale off these debts, so that the debtors probably could pay before he turned over his office to his successor. He did so. One owing a hundred *bath* of oil was told that he might scale off the debt to fifty. Another owing a hundred measures of wheat (500 to 1400 bushels) was told that he might scale it down twenty per cent. And so he went down the list. Such a use of his authority made him friends amongst those whom he had favored; and his lord complimented him upon the wisdom he had displayed.

Applying this parable, Jesus proportionately condemned the Pharisees for taking an opposite course. He had declared that the Scribes and the Pharisees sat in Moses' seat as interpreters of the Mosaic Law, and that, had they followed the course of this steward, they would have made friends of the poor publicans and sinners by trying to minimize their shortcomings, and to encourage them to do the best they could to comply with the demands of the Law. Instead, they bound heavy burdens upon the people and discouraged them.

All this on their part was hypocrisy; for they could not help knowing that they themselves were unable to comply with the requirements of the Law, which is the full measure of a perfect man's ability. Their proper attitude would have been to confess their own shortcomings, to strive to do their best, to appeal to God for mercy and to teach the common people to do similarly. So doing, they would have been better prepared to be received into the Gospel favor in the end of their Age. As it was, by their hypocrisies they were hindering themselves from becoming disciples of Jesus and from seeking grace and forgiveness of sins. They were also hindering others from becoming disciples by claiming that it was possible to have God's favor through keeping the Law.

APPLYING THE PARABLE

Jesus then said to His disciples, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail – at the end of your stewardship, at death – the results of your benevolence may cause that ye be received, in the resurrection, into the everlasting habitations. – Verse 9, paraphrase.

There is room for dispute in respect to the teachings of this parable, but to us it seems clear that Jesus meant that the wisdom of the unjust steward should be exercised by His disciples in their dealing with the mammon, the riches, of the present life. From the moment God's people give themselves to Him, they give also their earthly rights and interests, and become merely stewards of their

time, talent, influence, wealth, etc. "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God." Use all that you have energetically in the Divine service.

These stewards of the mercies of God have His approval in the use of all of earthly things to the forwarding of their spiritual interests; they will not be counted unjust squanderers, as they use their earthly opportunities for advancing their Heavenly interests. On the contrary, this will be reckoned to them for wise stewardship; and being found faithful in the use of earthly things in God's service, they can safely be entrusted with the greater things of the future. They will be received into the everlasting habitations and be granted a share with Messiah in His glorious Kingdom. They will be entrusted with all of God's favors to be bestowed upon mankind. Their unselfishness in the present time, their willingness to sacrifice, will be the basis of the Divine approval and glory to follow.

Unfaithfulness in the present time respecting things of trifling value in comparison would mean unfaithfulness in the future great things. Whoever therefore selfishly appropriates to himself the things of which he is steward will not be trusted with the future great things; and whoever is sacrificing will thus demonstrate his faithfulness, his loyalty to God, and to such the greater things will be entrusted. Would God entrust the riches of the future life and glory and honor to any who now prove themselves unfaithful, selfish, covetous, using present blessings merely for self-gratification? Surely not!

Jesus asks, "If ye have not been faithful in that which is another's, who shall give you that which is your own?" With the followers of Jesus all things of the present time are God's – the things of the present life belong to God, because we have consecrated or devoted them. The things of the future life belong to us, because God has promised them to us. But there are conditions; namely, our faithfulness, our loyalty. If we are not faithful in handling the things which we have devoted to God, He will not give to us by and by those things which He has promised shall be ours conditionally. If, then, we should

misappropriate the things consecrated to God – if we should abuse our stewardship and use those opportunities selfishly, could we expect God to give us the things which He has promised to give only to the faithful?

SERVING TWO MASTERS

There are two great impelling powers; one evil, the other good. These are known by different names and are in every way opposite. God is the Good Master; Satan is the evil master; but each has representatives and various **[R5437 : page 109]** interests. Thus God, His Spirit and His teachings, are represented by the word Love; while Satan and his course are represented by selfishness, covetousness, mammon. Through the fall of man the whole world has lost the Spirit of God, and has been under the domination of Satan for centuries. All have become more or less evil. The spirit of selfishness, covetousness, leading on to unrighteousness in general, has gotten hold upon our race, so that even after we see the wrong course it is with great difficulty that its power over us can be broken. "We cannot do the things which we would."

But here comes in the proposition of the Gospel: God desires some faithful souls to be associated with Jesus in dispensing His blessings. He offers this great prize of the Kingdom to those who will demonstrate that they have the right spirit. This prize is a pearl of great value. No other consideration can compare with it. Whoever intelligently accepts the Gospel call turns his back upon sin, selfishness and all the works of the flesh and the Devil related thereto, and sets his face Godward, loveward, rightward.

But it is not sufficient that he shall enter into a covenant to give up the world and walk in the footsteps of Jesus. It is not sufficient that God accepts that covenant and begets such a one of His Holy Spirit. More than this is needed. He must demonstrate not only that he prefers right to wrong on equal terms, but that he is willing to suffer the loss of all things that he may be on the side of right, on God's side.

Then comes in the trial and testing. He seeks to serve God and to gain the reward of glory, honor and immortality in the Kingdom with Jesus; but he finds a tendency in his flesh to look after and appreciate the rewards of mammon, selfishness. This brings about the great battle. One or the other must conquer. In addition to growing in grace, in knowledge and in love, the New Creature in Christ must feed upon the Divine encouragements and promises of the Bible. Otherwise he will be discouraged and utterly give up the fight against the world, the flesh and the Devil.

The Lord has promised grace sufficient in every time of need, to the faithful. He tells us that He knoweth that we are dust; He remembereth our frame, that we cannot do what we would like to do. But at the same time He requires that we do all that we are able to do, assuring us that for all such His grace will be sufficient; that is to say, to all such He will make up the deficiency.

In our lesson Jesus forewarns us that the choice we make must be a permanent one, that the supposition that we can serve God and mammon at the same time is a mistake. In proportion as we are faithful to one, we are unfaithful to the other. It is therefore for us to choose the service of God, counting it the greatest of our privileges, and its rewards the greatest of all rewards, and these for eternity.

After all, much will depend upon the degree of our faith. If we have faith in God, in His promise of great reward, if we have faith in the promise of the Savior to give us His grace and assistance in every time of need, it will be quite possible for us to fight the good fight and to gain the crown which the Lord hath in reservation for all those who love Him supremely.

