

Disciples Are Stewards

by William MacDonald

The parable of the unjust steward teaches us that we must plan for the future by using our material possessions to spread the gospel and serve God, rather than serving ourselves and our own interests.

Scripture: Luke 16:1

Topics: "Eternal Perspective", "Stewardship"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes that disciples of Christ are stewards of God's property and interests, as illustrated in the parable of the unjust steward. The parable teaches that while the steward acted dishonestly, he was wise in planning for his future, contrasting the worldly focus on earthly security with the eternal perspective of Christians. MacDonald urges believers to use their material possessions to win souls for Christ, thereby laying up treasures in heaven. He stresses that faithfulness in handling material things reflects one's character and ability to be trusted with spiritual riches. Ultimately, disciples must choose between serving God or wealth, as divided allegiance is impossible.

Transcript

Read Luke 16:1-13

It was to the disciples that the parable of the unjust steward was spoken. In it, the Savior sets forth principles that apply to disciples of all time. After all, the disciples of Christ are essentially stewards, entrusted with the care of His property and His interests here on earth.

The parable bristles with difficulties. It seems to commend dishonesty and crookedness. But when understood in its proper light, it is laden with instruction of greatest importance.

The story in brief is this. A wealthy property owner had hired an employee to care for his business. In the course of time, the master learned that this employee was squandering his money. Immediately he demanded an audit of the books, then gave him notice that his employment would be terminated.

The employee realized that his future prospects were dismal. He was too old to do hard, physical labor, and he was ashamed to beg. So he hit upon a scheme that would assure him friends for the days ahead. He went to one of his master's accounts and asked, "How much do you owe my boss?" The answer was "Seven hundred and fifty gallons of oil." "Well," said the employee, "pay for half that amount and we'll call it even." He went to another of his employer's debtors and asked, "How much do you owe?" The customer

replied, "Eight hundred bushels of wheat." "I see; well, you pay me six hundred and forty bushels, and we'll consider the account closed."

Even more shocking than the action of the dishonest employee is the comment that follows:

"And his lord commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely; for the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the children of light" (v. 8, Revised Version).

How are we to understand this apparent approval of dishonest business practices?

One thing is certain. Neither his lord nor our Lord commended such crookedness. It was this very thing that caused him to be dismissed in the first place. No righteous person could ever approve of such cheating and unfaithfulness. Whatever else the parable teaches, it does not suggest that embezzlement is ever justified.

There is only one thing for which the unjust steward could be commended, that is, that he planned for the future. He took steps to insure that he would still have friends after his stewardship had ended. He acted for "then" instead of "now."

That is the point of the parable. Worldly people take forceful action to provide for the days ahead. The only future they are concerned about is their old age, their years of retirement. So they work diligently to make sure that they will be comfortably situated when they are no longer able to carry on gainful employment. No stone is left unturned in their quest for social security.

In this respect, the unsaved are wiser than Christians. However, in order to understand why, we must realize that the Christian's future is not on this earth but in heaven. This is the crucial point. The future for an unbeliever means the time between now and the grave. The future for a child of God means eternity with Christ.

The parable teaches then that the unregenerate are more wise and aggressive in preparing for their future on earth than Christians are for theirs in heaven.

With this background, the Lord Jesus presents the practical application of the lesson:

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

The mammon of unrighteousness is money or other material possessions. We can use these things for winning souls to Christ. People won through our faithful use of money are here called "friends." A day is coming when we will fail (either die or be taken to heaven by Christ at the Rapture). Friends won through the wise use of our material possessions will then serve as a welcoming committee to receive us into the everlasting dwelling places.

This is the way in which wise stewards plan for the future--not by spending their little lives in a vain quest for security on earth; but in a passionate endeavor to be surrounded in heaven by friends who were won to Christ through their money. Money that was converted into Bibles, Testaments, scripture portions, tracts, and other Christian literature. Money that was used to support missionaries and other Christian workers. Money that helped to finance Christian radio programs and other worthy Christian activities. In short, money that was used for the spread of the gospel in any and every way. "The only way we can lay up our

treasures in heaven is to put them into something that is going to heaven."

When a Christian sees that his material possessions can be used in the salvation of precious souls, he loses his love for "things." Luxury, wealth and material splendor turn sour in his stomach. He longs to see the mammon of unrighteousness converted by divine alchemy into worshippers of the Lamb forever and ever. He is captivated by the possibility of doing a work in human lives that will bring eternal glory to God and eternal blessing to the people themselves. He feels something of the thirst of Rutherford:

O if one soul from Anworth

Meets me at God's right hand,

My heaven will be two heavens

In Immanuel's land.

Anne R. Cousin

To him all the diamonds, rubies and pearls, all the bank deposits, all the insurance policies, all the mansions, pleasure boats and magnificent cars are but mammon of unrighteousness. If used for self, they perish with the using, but if spent for Christ, they reap dividends throughout eternity.

The manner in which we deal with material things, the extent to which we grasp them is a test of our character. The Lord emphasizes this in verse 10:

The man who is dependable in a very small matter is dependable also in a large deal, the man who is dishonest in a very small matter is dishonest also in a large deal (Williams' Translation).

Here the very small matter is the stewardship of material things. Those who are dependable are the ones who use these things for the glory of God and the blessing of their fellow men. Those who are dishonest are the ones who use their possessions for comfort, luxurious living and selfish enjoyment. If a man cannot be trusted in a small matter (material things), how could he be trusted in a large deal (the stewardship of spiritual things). If a man is dishonest with the mammon of unrighteousness, how can he expect to be faithful as a minister of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1).

The Savior therefore presses the argument a step further:

If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches (verse 11).

Earthly treasures are not true riches; their value is finite and temporal. Spiritual treasures are true riches; their value cannot be measured and will never end. Unless a man is dependable in his handling of material things, he cannot expect God to trust him with spiritual prosperity in this life or treasures in heaven.

Again the Lord extends the argument by saying:

And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own (verse 12, Revised Version).

Material things are not our own; they belong to God. Everything that we possess is a sacred stewardship from God. All that can be called our own are the fruits of our diligent study and service here, and the rewards of faithful stewardship there. If we have not proved dependable in handling God's property, then we cannot expect to enter into the deep truths of God's Word in this life, or to be rewarded in the next.

With climactic emphasis, the Lord then summarized the teaching of the entire parable:

No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (verse 13).

There cannot be divided allegiance. A disciple cannot live for two worlds. A steward either loves God or loves mammon. If he loves mammon, he hates God.

And, mind you, this was written to disciples, not to the unsaved.

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