

## **The Parable of the Unjust Steward – Luke 16:1-14**

### **“Faithful in Least, Faithful in Much”**

Life on earth is extremely precious. Everyone is given a fixed time span. There is no top-up to this amount. Whatever is given to each individual is not up to him but only to the all sovereign God. He decides. Since man is not aware of the length of time he will spend on this earth, it is incumbent upon him to spend his time circumspectly. There is no second chance. Every second spent is a second gone. That second cannot be recalled back to be re-spent! During this time on earth, everyone is also given a certain amount of material belongings. He is to use them wisely and fruitfully. The God who has entrusted him with both will require an account from him on how he has spent them. This parable of the unjust steward teaches us how we ought to live this life and spend our time on this earth!

**Elements of the Parable** – A certain rich man is God; the unjust steward refers to any carnal man; mammon refers to all material possessions.

**Explaining the Parable** – The rich man called his steward to give an account of his stewardship. The rich man had heard that this steward was dishonest. In order to ascertain the truthfulness of this allegation against him, the rich man called the steward to prove his innocence. If the allegations were true, then he would lose his job as steward.

The steward knew that he was guilty of cheating his lord. Before he gave his account in the lord's presence, he started to reason how he must provide for himself after he loses his job. He said within himself that he could not dig. Literally, it means that he has no strength to dig. He was ashamed to beg. He was ashamed to start begging and to continue begging! This was the sad end which he anticipated would happen after working as a steward in his lord's household where he had servants under him. The phrase “I am resolved” in Greek is difficult to capture in English. A. T. Robertson said, “A difficult tense to reproduce in English. I knew, I know, I have known, all miss it a bit. It is a burst of daylight to the puzzled, darkened man: I've got it, I see into it now, a sudden solution.” He was desperate to provide for his future. Everything he had worked for was about to go up in smoke! In this state of desperation, he saw a light out of this long dark tunnel he had dug for himself.

He would provide for himself by making friends with some of the lord's debtors! These debtors would remember the kindness he shows them and would receive him into their houses when he needs help. While he still possessed the authority as his lord's steward, he began to reduce the debt of his lord's debtors. The amounts he reduced varied from 20 to 50 percent. These were quite substantial. He wanted to make an impression in the minds of the debtors that he had done them a good deed.

After Jesus mentioned this act of the unjust steward, He said that the lord commended the unjust steward for doing wisely! How could the lord commend this unjust steward for an unjust act? The statement of contrast he made will help us understand. The statement is, “for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” The lord did

not commend the unjust steward for his acts of cheating and self-preservation. He used the shrewd behaviour of the unjust steward to highlight to believers their shortsightedness, or rather foolishness. Are the children of light not supposed to understand the beginning and the end of this world? Are they not spiritually aware of the punishment for sins and the newness of spirit found in every truly born again believer? Did God not reveal to His children truths like the end of this world, sin and death, Hell and the Lake of Fire? Do believers not know that God has reserved this world for destruction by fire? If these revelations are true and the believers claim that they believe in God, then why are their lives not lived in light of these revelations and truths? In this sense, the children of the world are perceived to be wiser than the children of light. They lived their lives, albeit sinfully and wickedly, in light of their perceived future.

**Applying the Parable** –The LORD Himself gave the application of this parable when He said, “**9** Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. **10** He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. **11** If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? **12** And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?”

The first lesson to note is that believers must know how to use the material blessings from the LORD for His glory. All material belongings are considered as the least in this parable. They are temporal and will perish one day. Christians are to be generous and help those in need. By our good works, they may see Christ in us and glorify God by becoming Christians. When we die, they will also be in heaven to receive us. This is not a teaching about salvation by good works but rather to see the good works of the believers as bearing fruits of salvation.

The second lesson to learn is that faithfulness in the use of material blessings will result in faithfulness in much, such as taking care of the souls of believers. Souls are eternal and they are by far more precious than gold or silver or precious stones. Misers cannot be made pastors or elders or even deacons. They will be tight-fisted with the tithes and offerings of God's people. Their love for God's people will be carnal and warped. Such individuals will hamper God's work. Watch how a person handles his material belongings and you will see how he will handle God's people and God's work! Therefore, if he is unjust in his material things he will also be unjust in greater things.

The third lesson is that faithfulness breeds more faithfulness. If the believer does not know how to manage his unrighteous mammon (make right what he has gained by sinful means) God will surely not entrust him with true riches (tithes and offerings of God's people and the souls of people as well). God owns all things including all that belongs to the believer. If the believer does not know how to take care by using properly the material blessings, how will God give to him what could have been his eternally, i.e. his reward in heaven. In other words, sinners will do what is right after they become Christians. Zacchaeus returned to all the

money had taken wrongfully (unrighteous mammon) and with interest. This is one of the clear evidences of being genuinely born again.

This parable reveals the heart of the believer. He cannot love or serve both God and mammon. It is either God or mammon! He loves God as a true believer would or love mammon as a false believer would! The reaction of the Pharisees shows that they understood exactly what Jesus was talking about and who he was talking about. The Pharisees were covetous. They derided him, i.e. they scoffed or sneered at Christ!

How are you in relation to your material belongings? Are they your lord and master? Are you a miser? Wherein is your confidence – God or mammon? Does the loss in your bank account bring fear into your heart? To be faithful in least will mean that we will be faithful in much!