

The Unjust Steward's Objectionable Folly And His Commendable Prudence.

Text: Luke 16:1-9

1) His Objectionable Folly

Suggested Hymns:

2) His Commendable Prudence

371, 347, 377, 848, 392

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 16:1-9, ¹ *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. ² 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.'*

³ *"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. ⁴ I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'*

⁵ *"So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'⁷ 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.'*

⁸ *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. ⁹ "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The parable of the unjust steward has often been misinterpreted. In the first place, the papists have sought in it a prop with which

to support their erroneous doctrines that heaven must be gained by good deeds, and that the saints should be called upon to render their assistance that we might get to heaven.

In his Church Postil Luther says: *“This is a regular Gospel for priests and monks to make money, if we do not oppose.”* And Luther is right. For the papists call attention to Christ’s admonition, *“make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.”*

Look, they say, to get into the everlasting habitations of heaven a man must perform good deeds; he must make to himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; he must make such use of his money and goods in this life, as will insure to him the favour of the saints in heaven.

If he does this, the saints in heaven will pray for him, and plead for him with God, and finally receive him into the everlasting habitations.

But this is an explanation directly opposed to the clear Word of God and therefore cannot be correct. And so this explanation of the papists is utterly wrong, for it stands in direct opposition to the clear and unambiguous words of Scripture written in Ephesians 2:8–9, ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

It stands in direct opposition to the plain words of Isaiah 63:16, ¹⁶ *Doubtless You are our Father, Though Abraham was ignorant of us, And Israel does not acknowledge us.* How shall the saints do anything for us if they are ignorant of us and do not acknowledge us?

Another difficulty in the interpretation of this parable has been found in the fact that the unjust steward is held up for Christian imitation. For it is said, ⁸ *So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly.”*

Some have endeavoured to draw a remarkable conclusion from these words, the conclusion that, in case of extreme necessity, a Christian may transgress the commandments, for instance, lie and steal to get out of trouble.

But how can anyone with a sane mind read such things between the lines? Does the Lord really commend the steward's evil practice? No; He expressly calls him an unjust steward and classes him with the children of this world.

What the Lord is commending is not the steward's felony, his lawlessness, and the deception wrought upon his master, but the prudence he displays in securing for himself friends and a home. The steward was foolish in one way, and wise in another. His folly is objectionable, his prudence, however, is commendable.

Let us consider, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, *The Unjust Steward's Objectionable Folly And His Commendable Prudence*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. His Objectionable Folly

Our Gospel says, "*There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. ² 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.'*"

Look at the folly of this steward. He holds a good position, managing a rich man's estate, a position giving him his daily bread in abundance. He is honoured and respected among men. And, above all things, his conscience is clear, he is happy, as long as he faithfully performs the duties of his calling. He is leading a quiet and peaceable life in all decency and honesty.

But what is done? He begins to waste his master's goods. It is not said in what manner this was done. He may have grown reckless, not attending to his duties, letting things go to waste and ruin, so that the estate no more yielded the revenue which it should have brought under a faithful management.

Or he may have pilfered from his master's treasury and appropriated to himself small sums at first, and then larger sums, and used his master's money and goods in private speculation.

Regardless, he is a thief, and he knows it. His peace is gone. He knows that he is transgressing the commandment which says, "*Thou shalt not steal.*" How must he feel now! How his conscience must trouble him day and night!

And his reputation is gone, too. People soon see that there is something wrong. They talk about it. Before long the evil report reaches his master's ear, and the catastrophe is at hand. The unjust steward is summoned, and deposed at once, and told, "***Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.***"

Now was not this man an outright fool to waste his master's goods and thereby to sacrifice his position, and his reputation, and, above all, his own peace and that happiness which is the result of a good conscience?

But to this foolish act he adds another. Why does he not seek to restore the peace of his own conscience? Why does he not make it the aim of his future life to pay back to his master as much as he can of those wasted goods? Why does he not make an effort to get back his good name and reputation?

No; no sooner has he lost his position than he says within himself, ***What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg.***

And what does he do? He commits the fraud of changing the accounts in favour of his master's debtors. He reduces their debt in the books as much as fifty and twenty per cent. He heaps sin upon sin, deceit upon deceit, fraud upon fraud.

And although by this cunning act he has made provision for his future days, how must his conscience feel, that inward monitor which God gave into man's heart, which accuses the sinner without ceasing, which is like the worm that does not die, and like the fire that is not quenched!

What folly to resort to fraud for the purpose of maintaining your position in society, or averting embarrassments, or enriching yourself. As soon as a man returns to fraud, his peace is gone, and his conscience cries, "Thief!" before the world knows anything about it.

If such a man thinks that he is a Christian, he may try to find comfort in the thought that we are all sinners, sinning much and daily, and deserving nothing but punishment; but he will not find comfort in such a thought.

His conscience will tell him that his sins are not sins of weakness, such as Christians are subject to, but sins of malice, for which there is no excuse. God

says expressly in 1 John 3:9, *⁹ Whoever has been born of God does not sin.* In other words does not deliberately sin.

And when the fraud is exposed before the world, what is the result? His good name and reputation is wiped out. Not only will his victims denounce him, but he will be shunned by all honest and upright people, and nobody will trust him.

But what is worst of all, he makes the great God in heaven his enemy. Even if he could escape the meshes of the law and stand blameless before men in his fraudulent operations, the just and holy God has made a note of his vile acts.

There shall come a day when the words will ring in his ears, *“Give an account of your stewardship,”* when all must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body. Then the verdict shall be: *“Thieves will not inherit the kingdom of God.”¹*

Still we must say this also: There is help even for the thief. But his only salvation is true repentance. The unjust steward truly felt the effect of his folly when his office was taken from him; but not a trace of repentance do we find in this shrewd deceiver.

But blessed is the sinner who repents from an upright heart. Such repentance is manifested in true sorrow for having sinned against God, in asking Him for mercy, in firmly believing that by the blood of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, the ransom has been fully paid, and in restoring to the best of our ability the stolen goods.

Then the account is wiped out which stands against you, and your sin is covered with Jesus' blood and righteousness.

The greatest folly, however, is to follow the unjust steward's example in adding fraud to fraud, heaping sin upon sin, and plunging forward in the downward path. This is the direct way to hell.

2. His Commendable Prudence.

We proceed to the second part of our Gospel, which treats of the unjust steward's commendable prudence. *“⁴I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.’*

⁵ *“So he called every one of his master’s debtors to him, and said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’* ⁶ *And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ So he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’* ⁷ *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.”*

So the man’s prudence consisted in securing for himself the good will and obligation of his master’s debtors just in time, before he lost his office. He did that in an unlawful way, by fraud and deception; but the fact remains that thereby he secured their gratitude.

⁸ *“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.”*

In these words the unjust steward’s wisdom, his prudence, is placed before us as something worthy of imitation. As this steward acted wisely with respect to earthly things, providing in time for his temporal welfare, so we should act wisely in regard to heavenly things by providing in time for our eternal welfare.

Look at the children of this world. See how they toil and labour, how they scheme, and with perseverance and endurance they seek to accomplish their plans in order to gain honour, riches, and pleasures.

Are they not wiser in their generation than the children of light? Do not the children of this world make more strenuous efforts, rack their brains more, and take more pains to secure the good things of this world, to enjoy this life, than the Christians do, as a rule, to reach heaven and to make sure of a blessed hereafter?

Learn, then, from the children of this world. Learn from them how to be prudent, how to provide for the future, how to secure a home, not an earthly, but a heavenly home, in which to live forever.

See to it in time that you walk the narrow way which leads to eternal life; see that you live in the faith of the Son of God, and that you are ready at any moment to be received into heaven.

Christ therefore concludes, *“And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.”*

It is true prudence to make the right use of the mammon of unrighteousness, of money and wealth. Wisely the Lord says mammon “of unrighteousness.” When an old worn dollar gets into our hands, what tales of woe and injustice could that dollar tell, if it was to speak! To what unrighteous use may that dollar have been put in its long course!

Now to act wisely and prudently we should make to ourselves friends of this mammon of unrighteousness, that is, we should not waste and squander it, like the drunkard, who spends his earnings on intoxicating drinks, while his poor wife and children are starving, but in a proper way provide for those who are dependent on us.

Do not use it merely for our own personal gratification and enjoyment, but also assist those who are in need, and give freely and cheerfully for the kingdom of God, for its support and extension, for the Church and the ministerial office.

See, that is true prudence. In this way we shall make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. And these friends shall receive us into everlasting habitations.

All those who received the benefit of our earthly means shall stand up before the tribunal of God, and testify in our behalf, saying, *‘Lord Jesus, here are Your servants. Their works done to us show and prove that their faith in You was not a faith of the lips only, but a true living faith of the heart. See, O Lord, what they did for us!’*

Jesus says in Matthew 25:40, *‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’*

And thus these friends, by their testimony in our behalf, shall receive us into everlasting habitations, and we shall hear the Saviour’s welcome: *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*² Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

² Matthew 25:34