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The Parables of Jesus Christ: What the Godless Can Teach the Godly

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

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THE PARABLES OF JESUS CHRIST

PARABLE THIRTY-TWO: What the Godless Can Teach the Godly (Lk. 16:1-13)

SURVEY

The following outline will help to survey this parable:

- The crisis (16:1-2)
 1. The dishonesty of a manager (16:1)

He is accused of wasting his master's possessions.
 2. The dismissal of the manager (16:2)

He is fired.
- The concern (16:3)

The dishonest manager is worried about the future.
- The craftiness (16:4-7)
 1. The resolve of the manager (16:4)

He devises a plan to secure his future with some of his master's debtors.
 2. The reductions by the manager (16:5-7)

He reduces their debts by as much as fifty percent.
- The commendation (16:8)

His master grudgingly admits the shrewdness of the dishonest manager.
- The caution (16:9-12)

Jesus warns believers to be faithful even in little matters so that they can be trusted in larger matters.
- The choice (16:13)

One must choose between God and money!

SIGNIFICANCE

This has often been considered as being one of the most difficult of all Jesus' parables to understand, for at first glance it seems to be commending gross dishonesty!

Dr. Manford Gutzke and Dr. David Gooding offer the following helpful insights in solving this problem:

- Sometimes Jesus used parables that seem strange because the principal characters in the story engaged in practices that in themselves seem unrighteous. This is a story of an unjust steward. This man had control over materials belonging to his master. Then he was called upon to give an accounting of what he had done with his master's goods. He was to have his books audited, and he suddenly realized the record would show he had not been a good manager, with the result that in all probability he would lose his job. In such a case he would need friends, and so he turned his situation to his advantage and made friends with the people who owed money to his master.

The point Jesus was emphasizing was that this world should be used in such a way as to advance eternal benefits. The steward could always live with these people whom he had befriended. Jesus was saying money here on earth should be used in such a way that it will bring benefits in heaven. When a person is through with this world and gets to heaven, there will be eternal rewards from the use made of situations in this world. No matter how many may be surprised to note Jesus' seeming approval of the actions of an unjust man, no one ever misses the lesson as to how one could use money for spiritual advantages." (Manford Gutzke, *Plain Talk on Luke*, Zondervan Publishing, 1970, pp. 106, 107)

- The parable of the prodigal son introduced a young man who wasted his resources in dissolute living (see 15:13). The parable of this second paragraph presents a steward who wasted his master's goods, or so it was said (see 16:1). The first of the two parables teaches us that if we sinfully waste our lives and then, even at the eleventh hour, come back to God in true repentance and faith, the fact that we have wasted our lives will make no difference at all to the pardon we shall receive or to our acceptance with the Father. The second parable puts the other side of the story: if we waste our lives, it will in another sense make an eternal difference.

The steward's methods may not have been altogether just. We are not meant to copy them. But we are to copy his foresight. Realizing that he would soon have to leave his post and that he would not have control of his master's goods much longer, he used his temporary stewardship of those goods to make friends for himself, so that when he had to leave his job, they would receive him into their homes.

We are in a similar position. Nothing we have in this life belongs to us. We brought nothing into this world and we shall take nothing out of it (see 1 Tim. 6:7). We are simply stewards. One day we must go and leave it all. While we have in our control, therefore, what our Lord here calls 'the mammon of unrighteousness' (so called because, in this disordered world, it is unfairly distributed), we are to use it, not indeed in order to gain salvation, for nothing can buy that: it is a gift; but in order to make friends. Not fickle friends of the sort that the prodigal son is said to have made; but friends who will welcome us in the eternal world, and remain our friends eternally. 'Make to yourselves

friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles' (16:9).

We need to bring a little practical realism into our anticipation of what heaven will be like. In some respects it may not necessarily be all that different from what life is like now. We should consider that while all believers will be equally welcome in heaven and all be loved equally, not all will have equally as many friends. If when accounts are rendered and it becomes known in heaven that it was your sacrificial giving that provided the copies of the Gospel of John which led a whole tribe out of paganism to faith in Christ, will not that whole tribe show towards you an eternal gratitude which they will not show towards me who spent my spare cash on some luxury for my own enjoyment?" (David Gooding, *According to Luke*, Erdmans Publishing, 1987, pp. 272, 273)

- The thrust of this parable seems to be threefold:
 1. Realize that we are but stewards, controlling things (our time, talents, treasure), but owning nothing.
 2. Realize that someday our Master will check our bookkeeping.
 3. In light of this, we are to plan ahead, make friends, but be honest in all of our dealings.