

In this version, the Bible texts have been modified into modern English, the punctuation improved, headings and emphasis have been added, and some paragraphs altered.

Part 28

Chapter 26 – “Friends by the Mammon of Unrighteousness”

The problem

Christ's coming was at a time of intense worldliness. Men were subordinating the eternal to the temporal, the claims of the future to the affairs of the present. They were mistaking phantoms for realities, and realities for phantoms. They did not by faith behold the unseen world. Satan presented before them the things of this life as all-attractive and all-absorbing, and they gave heed to his temptations.

Christ came to change this order of things. He sought to break the spell by which men were infatuated and ensnared. In His teaching He sought to adjust the claims of heaven and earth, to turn men's thoughts from the present to the future. From their pursuit of the things of time, He called them to make provision for eternity.

The parable

“There was a certain rich man,” He said, “which had a steward; and the same was accused to him that he had wasted his goods”. [See Luke 16:1-13.]

The rich man had left all his possessions in the hands of this servant; but the servant was unfaithful, and the master was convinced that he was being systematically robbed. He determined to retain him no longer in his service, and he called for an investigation of his accounts. “How is it,” he said, “that I hear this of you? Give an account of your stewardship; for you may be no longer steward”.

With the prospect of discharge before him, the steward saw three paths open to his choice. He must labour, beg, or starve.

“And he said within himself, ‘What shall I do? For my lord takes away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig [work]; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses’. So he called every one of his lord’s debtors to him, and said to the first, ‘How much owe you to my lord?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil’. And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly, and write [change it to] fifty [and I’ll certify it]’. Then said he to another, ‘And

how much owe you?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat’. And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write fourscore [eighty].’”

This unfaithful servant made others sharers with him in his dishonesty. He defrauded his master to advantage them, and by accepting this advantage they placed themselves under obligation to receive him as a friend into their homes.

“And the lord [the rich man] commended the unjust [dishonest] steward, because he had done wisely [in a earthly sense]”. The worldly man praised the sharpness of the man who had defrauded him.

But the rich man's commendation was not the commendation of God.

Christ did not commend [agree with the deeds of] the unjust steward, but He made use of a well-known occurrence to illustrate the lesson He desired to teach.

“Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon [affluence] of unrighteousness [worldly riches],” He said, “that when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles”. R.V.

The tax gatherers

The Saviour had been censured by the Pharisees for mingling with publicans and sinners. But His interest in them was not lessened, nor did His efforts for them cease. He saw that their employment brought them into temptation. They were surrounded by enticements to evil. The first wrong step was easy, and the descent was rapid to greater dishonesty and increased crimes. Christ was seeking by every means to win them to *higher aims* and nobler principles. *This purpose* He had in mind in the story of the unfaithful steward. There had been among the publicans just such a case as that represented in the parable, and in Christ's description they recognized their own practices. Their attention was arrested, and from the picture of their own dishonest practices many of them learned a lesson of spiritual truth [by contrast].

The disciples

The parable was, however, spoken directly to the disciples. To them first the leaven of truth was imparted, and through them it was to reach others. Much of Christ's teaching the disciples did not at first understand, and often His lessons seemed to be almost forgotten. But under the influence of the Holy Spirit these truths were afterward revived with distinctness, and through the

disciples they were brought vividly before the new converts who were added to the church.

The Pharisees

And the Saviour was speaking also to the Pharisees. He did not relinquish the hope that they would perceive the force of His words. Many had been deeply convicted, and as they should hear the truth under the dictation of the Holy Spirit, not a few would become believers in Christ.

The Pharisees had tried to bring Christ into disrepute by accusing Him of mingling with publicans and sinners. Now He turns the rebuke on these accusers. The scene known to have taken place among the publicans He holds up before the Pharisees both as representing their course of action and as showing the only way in which they can redeem their errors.

Selfishness

To the unfaithful steward his lord's goods had been entrusted for benevolent purposes [he was SUPPOSED to give them away to the poor and needy]; but he had used them for himself.

So with Israel. God had chosen the seed of Abraham. With a high arm He had delivered them from bondage in Egypt. He had made them the depositaries of sacred truth for the blessing of the world. He had entrusted to them the living oracles that they might communicate the light to others. But His stewards had used these gifts to enrich and exalt themselves.

The Pharisees, filled with self-importance and self-righteousness, were misapplying the goods lent them by God to use for His glory.

The true meaning

The servant in the parable had made no provision for the future.

The goods entrusted to him for the benefit of others he had used for himself; but he had thought only of the present.

When the stewardship should be taken from him, he would have nothing to call his own. But his master's goods were still in his hands, and he determined to use them so as to secure himself against future want. To accomplish this he must work on *a new plan*. Instead of gathering for himself, he must impart to others. Thus he might secure friends, who, when he should be cast out, would receive him.

So with the Pharisees. The stewardship was soon to be taken from them, and they were called upon to provide for the future. Only by seeking the good of others could they benefit themselves. Only by imparting God's gifts in the present life could they provide for eternity.

[Thus the PRINCIPLE was right in the story – the APPLICATION was wrong.]

After relating the parable, Christ said, “The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light”. [Luke 16:8.] That is, worldly-wise men display more wisdom and earnestness in serving themselves than do the professed children of God in their service to Him. So it was in Christ's day. So it is now. Look at the life of many who claim to be Christians. The LORD has endowed them with capabilities, and power, and influence; He has entrusted them with money, that they may be co-workers with Him in the great redemption. All His gifts are to be used in blessing humanity, in relieving the suffering and the needy. We are to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to care for the widow and the fatherless, to minister to the distressed and downtrodden. God never meant that the widespread misery in the world should exist. He never meant that one man should have an abundance of the luxuries of life, while the children of others should cry for bread. The means over and above the actual necessities of life are entrusted to man to do good, to bless humanity.

The LORD says, “Sell that you have, and give alms [gifts to the poor]”. Luke 12:33. Be “ready to distribute, willing to communicate”. 1 Timothy 6:18. “When you make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind”. Luke 14:13. “Loose the bands of wickedness,” “undo the heavy burdens,” “let the oppressed go free,” “break every yoke”. “Deal your bread to the hungry,” “bring the poor that are cast out to your house”. “When you see the naked, . . . cover him”. “Satisfy the afflicted soul”. Isaiah 58:6-7, 10. “Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”. Mark 16:15. These are the LORD's commands. Are the great body of professed Christians doing this work?

Living for the present

Alas, how many are appropriating to themselves the gifts of God! How many are adding house to house and land to land. How many are spending their money for pleasure, for the gratification of appetite, for extravagant houses, furniture, and dress. Their fellow beings are left to misery and crime, to disease and death. Multitudes are perishing without one pitying look, one word or deed of sympathy.

Men are guilty of robbery toward God. Their selfish use of means robs the LORD of the glory that should be reflected back to Him in the relief of suffering humanity and the salvation of souls. They are embezzling His entrusted goods. The LORD declares, “I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against . . . those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right”. “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me. But you say, Wherein have we robbed You? In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse; for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation”. Malachi 3:5, 8-9.

“Go to now, you rich men, . . . your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you. . . . You have heaped treasure together for the last days”. “You have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton”. “Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cries: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the LORD of sabaoth [the host]”. James 5:1-3, 5, 4.

Everyone will be required to render up his entrusted gifts. In the day of final judgment men's hoarded wealth will be worthless to them. They have nothing they can call their own. [Only that which they have shared with others will have value then.]

Those who spend their lives in laying up worldly treasure show less wisdom, less thought and care for their eternal well-being, than did the unjust steward for his earthly support.

Less wise than the children of this world in their generation are these professed children of the light. These are they of whom the prophet declared, in his vision of the great judgment day, “A man shall cast the idols of his silver, and the idols of his gold [margin]; which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake terribly the earth”. Isaiah 2:20-21.

Use your riches now while you can

“Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness,” Christ says, “that when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles”. R.V. God and Christ and angels are all ministering to the afflicted, the suffering, and the sinful. Give yourself to God for this work, use His gifts for this purpose, and you enter into partnership with heavenly beings. Your heart will throb in sympathy with theirs. You will be

assimilated to them in character. To you these dwellers in the eternal tabernacles will not be strangers. When earthly things shall have passed away, the watchers at heaven's gates will bid you welcome.

And the means used to bless others will bring returns. Riches rightly employed will accomplish great good. Souls will be won to Christ. He who follows Christ's plan of life will see in the courts of God those for whom he has labored and sacrificed on earth. Gratefully will the ransomed ones remember those who have been instrumental in their salvation. Precious will heaven be to those who have been faithful in the work of saving souls.

The application

The lesson of this parable is for all. Everyone will be held responsible for the grace given him through Christ. Life is too solemn to be absorbed in temporal or earthly matters. The LORD desires that we shall communicate [pass on] to others that which the eternal and unseen communicates to us.

Every year millions upon millions of human souls are passing into eternity unwarned and unsaved. From hour to hour in our varied life opportunities to reach and save souls are opened to us. These opportunities are continually coming and going. God desires us to make the most of them. Days, weeks, and months are passing; we have one day, one week, one month less in which to do our work. A few more years at the longest, and the voice which we cannot refuse to answer will be heard saying, "Give an account of your stewardship".

Christ calls upon every one to consider. Make an honest reckoning. Put into one scale Jesus, which means eternal treasure, life, truth, heaven, and the joy of Christ in souls redeemed; put into the other every attraction the world can offer. Into one scale put the loss of your own soul, and the souls of those whom you might have been instrumental in saving; into the other, for yourself and for them, a life that measures with the life of God. Weigh for time and for eternity. While you are thus engaged, Christ speaks: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mark 8:36.

God desires us to choose the heavenly in place of the earthly. He opens before us the possibilities of a heavenly investment. He would give encouragement to our loftiest aims, security to our choicest treasure. He declares, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir". Isaiah 13:12. When the riches that moth devours and rust corrupts shall be swept away, Christ's followers can rejoice in their heavenly treasure, the riches that are imperishable.

Better than all the friendship of the world is the friendship of Christ's redeemed.

Better than a title to the noblest palace on earth is a title to the mansions our LORD has gone to prepare. And better than all the words of earthly praise will be the Saviour's words to His faithful servants, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world". Matthew 25:34.

It's not too late

To those who have squandered His goods, Christ still gives opportunity to secure lasting riches. He says, "Give, and it shall be given to you". "Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that fails not, where no thief approaches, neither moth corrupts". Luke 6:38; 12:33. "Charge them that are rich in this world, . . . that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life". 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

Then let your property go beforehand to heaven. Lay up your treasures beside the throne of God. Make sure your title to the unsearchable riches of Christ. "Make to yourselves [everlasting] friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness [your earthly talents and riches], that when it [your earthly wealth] shall fail, they [your friends] may receive you into the eternal tabernacles [of heaven]". R.V.

oooOooo