

# THE UNJUST STEWARD AND THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

BIBLE TEXT : Luke 16 :1-31

LESSON 179 Junior Course

**MEMORY VERSE:** Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).

## BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

### Luke 16:1-31

<sup>1</sup> And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

<sup>2</sup> And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

<sup>3</sup> Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

<sup>4</sup> I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

<sup>5</sup> So he called every one of his lord's debtors *unto him*, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

<sup>6</sup> And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

<sup>7</sup> Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

<sup>8</sup> And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much:

## BIBLE REFERENCES:

### NOTES:

#### **Stewards**

In the first part of this lesson Jesus spoke to His disciples in a parable. It concerns an unfaithful steward who wasted his master's goods. A steward is one who is put in charge of the affairs of another — one who is entrusted with the managing of affairs not his own.

Jesus taught in other parables that all persons are stewards, entrusted by God with the things they have, including their lives and talents, as well as other possessions. The day will come when "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

The unjust steward of Jesus' parable had wasted the goods of his master. We are not told in what manner they were wasted, whether they were stolen, misused, or damaged and lost through carelessness. The time came when he was required to give an account of his stewardship.

If you were called today to give an account of your life, would you prove to be an unfaithful steward, too? Is your life being used to give glory and praise to God by living for Him? Or is it damaged by sin and lost by being used for your own pleasure and gain, carelessly forgetting God?

The steward was commended by his master for acting wisely, not for doing wrong. If the unfaithful steward was dismissed, he would be in want. Perhaps he had not thought about it before, but then he wondered what to do. He said, "I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed." No doubt he meant that he would not rather than that he could not. We do not read that he was either lame or old. Perhaps he was lazy and was not used to digging, and he was too proud to beg.

There are many people whose souls are in want. They will not beg for mercy. Their own ability and the labor of this world will never satisfy nor save their souls.

#### **Acting Wisely**

By gaining favor with the debtors, when he was turned out, the unjust steward hoped to secure for himself a place in their homes. Even though he considered his condition late, he acted with foresight and did what he could with what was left. He bargained with the debtors for an amount much less than they owed — to put himself in favor with the debtors.

#### **True Riches**

The Lord would have His people to be as spiritually concerned as the children of this world are concerned about material things.

Some people are greatly concerned about their material welfare, and even when they are young their thoughts are for preparation for temporal gain. Through this parable God would speak to us to consider less the riches of the world, which are fleeting, and to concern ourselves more with the grace and glory of God.

One cannot serve two masters — God and Satan — at the same time. By serving God one can have the true riches. "Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness" (Proverbs 8:18). To those "rich in faith" God has promised that they will be "heirs of the kingdom" (James 2:5). Let us trust "in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy"; let us "be rich in good

and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

<sup>11</sup> If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*?

<sup>12</sup> And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.

<sup>15</sup> And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

<sup>16</sup> The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

<sup>17</sup> And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.

<sup>18</sup> Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from *her* husband committeth adultery.

<sup>19</sup> There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

<sup>20</sup> And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

<sup>21</sup> And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

<sup>22</sup> And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by

works," laying up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life (**1 Timothy 6:17-19** <sup>17</sup> Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; <sup>18</sup> That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; <sup>19</sup> Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.).

### Criticizers

Some of the Pharisees heard Jesus speak this parable of the unjust steward, and began to ridicule Jesus. In their hearts they were justifying themselves. They sought the things which brought the admiration of the world instead of seeking the things of God. Then Jesus taught a lesson concerning the life to come. The way one lives on earth determines the way he will spend eternity. Jesus showed to these mockers the end of the lives of two men, and what happened to them after they left this world. Jesus spoke this as an actual happening, not as a parable.

### Two Men

A rich man, whose name is not given, had adorned himself in rich clothing. He had provided himself with whatever his appetite and taste craved and his money could buy. Apparently he indulged in that which pleased his body — a life of ease and pleasure, and ruin to his soul. We are not told how he gained his wealth; perhaps it was by honest means.

It is not unlawful to have good food, good clothing, and riches; but many times wealth becomes dangerous. Often people become proud and forget God.

At the gate of the rich man's home Lazarus was laid. He was a beggar, poor and afflicted. He would have been content with the crumbs from the rich man's table. He desired to be fed, but we are not told that he received any help or sympathy from the rich man. The poor man must have suffered more than hunger, for his body was full of sores. The dogs were more kind to him than the rich man was, for they licked Lazarus' sores, perhaps in pity and friendliness.

We note that the rich man did not abuse Lazarus nor forbid him to lie at his gate. He was unconcerned, and perhaps went by Lazarus without a word of kindness or sympathy.

### Death

In time both men died, for death is common to all people, the rich and poor alike. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

A person's spiritual condition cannot be judged by his outward condition. As it is possible to be rich and righteous, so it is possible to be poor, afflicted, and forgetful of God. Lazarus was carried to Abraham's bosom because he was a righteous man, not because he was sick and poor.

### After Death -

The rich man was buried, perhaps with a great funeral. Compare Lazarus' honor and happiness with the torment of the rich man who failed to make his peace with God.

The rich man prayed — too late. In hell, while he was enduring utmost misery and anguish, he saw the comforts of Lazarus. The rich man found that hell is real. He did not sleep. He was conscious and had possession of all his senses. He could see Lazarus, which, no doubt, added to his torment. He felt the flame which burned and did not consume. He could hear Abraham's voice; and he remembered the things he had once enjoyed.

### In Torment

The rich man cried in his misery to Abraham. This man, who had not shown mercy, begged that Lazarus, the victim of his merciless neglect, might be sent to show him mercy. The rich man

the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

<sup>23</sup> And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

<sup>24</sup> And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

<sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

<sup>26</sup> And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence.

<sup>27</sup> Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

<sup>28</sup> For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

<sup>29</sup> Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

<sup>30</sup> And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

<sup>31</sup> And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

did not ask to be re-leased. He begged for only a little relief. His request was small — Lazarus' finger dipped in water to cool his tongue. He did not even ask for a drink — only that the finger of Lazarus might be dipped in water to cool his tongue. To be tormented by fire is very painful, and causes terrible suffering for the body.

The rich man suffered more than pain, for Abraham told him to "remember." Perhaps he thought of the comforts and luxuries of his home where he had given commands to others. Now he was begging for relief. Probably he remembered with regret how many times he could have showed kindness to Lazarus.

The rich man was told that his request was impossible. No request is granted in hell. His sins had separated him eternally from God (**Isaiah 59:2** <sup>2</sup> But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.). Even if Lazarus would have desired to help him, it could not have been done, for a great gulf was fixed.

The rich man abandoned all hope for himself, but he made another request. He was concerned about his family. Undoubtedly in life he had done nothing to help them spiritually. Now he wanted them to make the most of their opportunity, while they were alive and could make their peace with God. So long as there is life there is a chance to avoid such an ending as the rich man suffered. After death, nothing can be done. "If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be" (Ecclesiastes 11:3).

### Too Late

The rich man was acquainted with Lazarus and called him by name, and he knew his brothers would recognize Lazarus. He thought surely his brothers would repent if Lazarus returned from the dead. Perhaps Lazarus had testified to them before he died, at least by his life if not in words. The rich man was told that the Bible tells people how to be saved, and they could escape punishment if they believed what was written by the prophets. If a person does not believe the Bible, he will not believe even though someone should rise from the dead. The rich man became concerned about himself and his brothers too late.

Jesus gave us this lesson to show the reward for one who serves God, and the torment that awaits one who serves mammon.

How are you living? Like Lazarus, one may not always have every-thing in this world to make him comfortable; but by repentance and faithful service to God he can be happy here and avoid the torments here- after. "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" (Deuteronomy 32:29).

### QUESTIONS

- 1 Why was the steward unjust ?
- 2 How are you as a steward?
- 3 Why was the steward commended?
- 4 How were Lazarus and the rich man different from each other in life?
- 5 How were they different after death?
- 6 What caused the difference?
- 7 How can a person avoid the torments that the rich man endured?
- 8 Why did not the rich man get some relief?