

Luke 16v1-9 Parable of the Unjust Steward 20th June 2024

This parable was directed at the disciples of Jesus, rather than the crowds of Jews who came to hear him. It follows on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which was spoken to a more general audience. That the passage is not aimed at everyone means that when we seek to understand it we need to narrow that focus.

The judgment against the steward was made before the account was given in that he was to be suspended from office "*for thou mayest be no longer steward*". He was on notice that he was about to lose his responsibilities but the final decision was to be ratified after the examination. The unjust steward used his final time as the steward of his lord to manoeuvre matters in his favour. He understood that he had no physical ability to be a labourer, who would hire him for such strenuous work, no-one! Also, as a person of former status he was too ashamed to beg, from others, having been in a position before of exercising largesse himself to those less fortunate than himself.

He was a steward – a manager of the house. This is a position of sensitivity and responsibility. There is an implication of trust, which sadly because of the flesh, can be easily abused by those of less integrity than the role requires. Are we good stewards ourselves? Can our Lord put his trust in us?

By stealing from his lord, he may have earned a nod of understanding, but it is not for the disciples to emulate this behaviour. Rather it is the determination and decisiveness that are emphasised and encouraged. If we acted as those with whom God has a purpose, then God will rise up and bestow that ability to execute that purpose. If we want to preach, then a determination to preach will be rewarded with an opportunity. Not necessarily in the way we might imagine or prefer, but it will happen. If it does not happen then maybe that is because we hold back and are restrained in our efforts, and so God does not work with us after all.

One of the interesting aspects of this parable is the commendation which the Lord gave of the unjust steward. Even though he lied and sort to extort money from his employer, the unjust steward was said to have acted wisely. Using wisdom is not something which is moral, being wise can be employed for evil just as it can be employed for the pursuit of righteousness. In this circumstance, the Lord understood the children of this world all in their generation wiser than the children of light. The employment of wisdom, logic, intelligence does not determine whether that person is right or wrong morally. What it does illustrate is that the children of this world are more logical in their application of what they're doing. They want to get rich and therefore all other considerations are submerged under that goal. They will lie and extort as required in order to further their bank balance. The children of light are sadly less single minded in their determination to pursue their own course. There are many distractions which take them away from the path of true wisdom and they're often seen to be people who say and do not.

Verse 9 is interesting. *"Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations"*. This is irony, not a contradictory command to abandon all probity. We are not to befriend unrighteousness at all, the very reverse. We can be sure that it is irony when we consider two facts. First the inevitable failure – *"that when ye fail"* – not if, but when. Secondly, the promised result is not positive – *"they may receive you into everlasting habitations"*. Such unrighteousness has no power to grant everlasting habitations, that is a play on the false beliefs of those who do so uphold that it is so. There are no everlasting habitations except for death itself. Those who enter that everlasting habitation will not be raised to face the actual judgment of the Lord of all, Jesus Christ. They remain dead "forever".

The only shared future with unrighteousness is death. There is no habitation beyond the skies as a reward for lying and extortion!

Even death will end and will itself be destroyed by God. That does not mean that the dead will return from death, but rather that there will be no new deaths. Even animal death, introduced because of sin, will end. God did not use the process of death to create, but as a punishment after creation. Death is not part of the “very good” of the initial creation.

The ultimate logic is not the get rich wisdom of the children of this world, but the real understanding that the end of all such unacceptable behaviour is disintegration in the ground, eaten by worms and a return to the dust from whence we are all manufactured. Lining the death cell with bright and pretty pictures, does not prevent the divine sentence of death to be executed against all sinners. Death only exists because of sin.

When we consider how long forever is, we need to analyse the original Greek. The word everlasting is translated from the Greek “aionios” meaning age- lasting. It does not mean permanent or eternal by definition but can be used in that sense. It is also translated as eternal. The idea of eternity in the New Testament is in the sense as having no end as expressly stated in Ephesians 3v21 *“Unto him be glory in the ecclesia by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end, Amen”*. To the Greek language, every age because it is defined by time, itself a created aspect, always has a beginning and end, by definition. That is not how the serpent reasons who introduced the first lie – thou shalt not surely die.

We are only here for a limited time. If we are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, then our stewardship will be carefully examined at the judgement seat, and it will be considered if in any degree we have made ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. Friendship with this world is enmity with God. Commercial interests and the seeking of economic advantage can be dangerous distractions from our primary goals and aspirations. They must not be allowed to cloud our service to him, as those who are stewards of the mysteries.

A Voice from the Altar

Russel Noonan