

The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

IN THE INTEREST OF JARVIS STREET BAPTIST
CHURCH, TORONTO, AND OF EVANGELICAL TRUTH

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PASTOR AND EDITOR

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1: 16.

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

A Sermon by the Pastor.

Preached in Jarvis Street Church, Toronto, Sunday evening, Jan. 14th, 1923.

(Stenographically reported.)

"So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first,
How much owest thou unto my lord?"—Luke 16: 5.

STUDENTS of the Scripture will be familiar with the common interpretation of this parable of the unjust steward. The key to the parable is said to be in the ninth verse: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." It is said that we are not to press our interpretation of the parable in detail, but to take the general and central teaching of the parable, that we are to use our money, "the unrighteous mammon," as it is called, that when we shall have done with it here we shall have made friends by its proper use on the other side, and that they will receive us into everlasting habitations. I have been familiar with that interpretation of the parable for years, and have read every thing that I could find on the parable of the unjust steward, but always with the feeling that that interpretation was altogether unsatisfactory.

In the first place, I know of no other place in the Scripture where we are taught that by the use of our means, or by any effort that we can possibly make ourselves, we can prepare the way for our reception into the eternal tabernacles or everlasting habitations.

The objection, primarily, to that interpretation is that it makes salvation to be of works and not of grace. And I always feel that any interpretation which conditions a man's entrance into the other life upon anything that he can do, seems to me to contravene the great and cardinal principle, that salvation is by grace alone. I am well aware that the teaching of Scripture is, that while "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord," over and above that gift we are to receive rewards for our works. Just as a father

may reward his faithful children. They do not become his children by reason of their faithfulness; but being his children, they are rewarded according to their works. And so it is true that we are received into the family of God by an act of grace, justified by the Lord Himself: by the imputation of Christ's righteousness we are made His children. Then over and above that free gift of His grace, we are to be rewarded for our works. But still the interpretation is unsatisfactory, even when that principle is admitted.

I believe that many a passage of Scripture is seen in its true light when we are brought into the experience for which that passage was written, and I venture to believe that light was thrown upon this passage, for myself at least, in an experience through which I passed some years ago.

I went to assist a country pastor in evangelistic services. I preached, so far as I knew how, the doctrines of grace, that it means something to be a Christian, that when Jesus is received as Saviour He must be received as Lord; and that discipleship means putting Christ first seven days of every week. Almost at the first service, one of the deacons, an old man, came to me and said, "I am a Baptist, and I do not believe your doctrine at all." Well I said, I thought I was a bit of a Baptist myself, and I thought I had been preaching the things for which Baptists usually stood. "Ah well," said he, "I believe in being justified by grace. I believe our sins are washed away by the precious blood." I said, "So do I." He said, "I do not believe in these impossible standards that you are setting up." I said "My dear brother, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. But you must never forget that we are predestinated that we may be conformed—not that we may get into heaven, not that we may escape hell,—but that we may be conformed to the image of his Son. We are elected to become like Christ, and Christ is formed in us the hope of glory. With conversion that process of sanctification begins and should continue until the day that we are presented at last 'faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.'" A day or so afterwards the pastor came to me in great distress, and said that down at the corner store Deacon So-and-so had come in upon a company of men who made no profession of religion at all, but who were talking about the meetings in the Baptist church. When the old man came in, hearing their conversation, he said, "Now look here, boys, don't you let that preacher disturb you, I am a good deal older than he is. I was baptized before he was born. I know the gospel, and all that stuff about making Jesus Lord and keeping His commandments, is all nonsense. It is by trusting Jesus Christ and being washed in the blood we are saved, and that is all there is to it. Don't allow yourselves to be unset by the impossible standards set up by this man's preaching." And I turned to this sixteenth chapter of Luke and read again that story of the unjust steward, and I said to myself, "I have always wondered who you were, but I think I have identified you at last."

Let us go over the story in a very simple way this evening for a few minutes. I want you to GET THE SETTING OF IT. The fifteenth chapter of Luke contains those three matchless parables, of the lost sheep, and the lost coin, and the lost son. And they were drawn forth by the murmuring of the Pharisees, who said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Then Jesus spoke those three parables, to illustrate the joy of heaven over repenting sinners, the attitude of God toward the contrite in heart. And then this chapter begins. "And he said also unto his disciples." If you have your

Bibles look at the fourteenth verse, and you will read, "And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him." Now observe: He has been speaking to the Pharisees in the fifteenth chapter, rebuking them for their complaint, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them," and now He directs His message particularly to His disciples, but it is *in the hearing of the Pharisees*: And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him." We shall return to that in a moment, but that is the setting. He is speaking to His disciples in the hearing of the Pharisees, and it is the Pharisees who do not like the preacher's sermon, as some people do not like the preaching of to-day when it comes home.

Now look at this Pharisee, who is the steward. *Of what stewardship is the Lord speaking?* Every true Christian is a steward, "for ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." We are Christ's bond-slaves, and we are stewards of whatever worldly goods we possess. But the Apostle Paul said, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Paul says that the special requirement of one that is entrusted with something that belongs to another is that he should be faithful to his trust. He says, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." These things are committed unto us. In his Epistle to Titus Paul describes the minister or pastor as a steward of God; the Apostle Peter speaks of believers in general, but of the ministers of the truth in particular, as "stewards of the manifold grace of God." Every blood-bought soul must realize that he has nothing of his own; that whatever he has, whether of material goods, or of the truth of the gospel, he is made a steward before God to administer that with a view to his accountability to his Master. This has application to every disciple.

"He said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward." We are all stewards, and I believe that the ministers of the truth are in a very special sense made trustees under God. The gospel is committed to our trust. Now this man was accused unto his lord of having wasted his goods. I think that that time of reckoning takes place frequently. It ought to take place daily. Every time we read the Word of the Lord it should remind us of our obligation; it should search our hearts and try our motives. Every time the Word of the Lord is preached, it ought to be preached in such a way as to say to every soul that hears it, Give an account of thy stewardship. How far are we being faithful to our trust as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ? Now this man was accused of having wasted his master's goods, was called to account, and was told by his lord that that condition of things could not continue: "Thou mayest be no longer steward."

I believe in the old-fashioned doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, that when God saves a man, He saves him for ever; but I do not believe that all who say they are saved are saved. There is a possibility of our being mistaken, and that is why the minister should be faithful to his people always, that they may make sure work of it, and make their calling and election sure. Let me pause a moment to warn you against a one-sided view of truth. Do not be content with one aspect of the truth. Remember that truth has many sides, that while the doctrine of divine sovereignty is clearly taught in the Word, so is the doctrine of human accountability to God. They are both

there; and whether you can reconcile them or not, they are both to be believed, because they are both taught in the Word of God.—In the fifteenth chapter of John, our Lord says, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Every branch that beareth not fruit is taken away, and "men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." There is a judgment to come. There is a time of reckoning in the future; but I believe the Lord takes account of His stewards every day; He calls us to account, and sometimes He puts the unfaithful steward out of his stewardship, He cuts off the branch, He casts it into the fire, and, even by men it is burned. This man said, "What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed." It is a picture of a man who is brought face to face with this fact: "I have made a profession, I stand outwardly in a certain relationship to my God, I have proved unfaithful to my trust, and He demands of me that I give an account. What shall I do? How shall I get back into right relationship to my Master?" And there is one of two ways. He knows there is a great deficit, and he says, "Can I pay my way on that score?" He sees it is impossible. He says, "I cannot dig, I cannot make up the deficit, I cannot restore the years that the locusts have eaten. Well then, shall I make a clean breast of the whole matter? Shall I come to him and beg for mercy? Shall I acknowledge my default? Shall I ask for forgiveness? Shall I ask for reinstatement in his favour? What shall I do?" Have you ever been brought there? I confess I have again and again. The Lord has come to me and has said, How is it that I hear this of thee? Why are you wasting My goods? Why are you not more faithful to your trust? How is it that I hear this of thee? And we are compelled to ask the question, What shall I do?

Sir Wilfred Grenfell once went into one of Mr. Moody's meetings. He was a nominal Christian, and after he had heard that man of God speak, he came out and he said, "By God's help I am going to make my religion real, or chuck it!" He was brought face to face with the matter, and he said, What shall I do? And he resolved what to do. He resolved that he would be a true steward, a faithful steward; and he went in humble penitence to the Lord because he was not ashamed to beg. And when that conviction is wrought into the heart of an unfaithful professor of religion, that we are not in right relationship to Christ, we are forced to ask that question. I want to tell you this, my friend, there is no hope for any one of us while we say, "To beg I am ashamed:" it is only as we come begging for mercy, crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" only as we plead the promise, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," that we shall be restored to favour, and permitted to retain our stewardship. But when one says, "I cannot dig, I cannot make up for my delinquencies myself; and to beg I am ashamed; I cannot get right on the principle of merit, and will not humble myself to ask for grace," then he has made a momentous decision. In effect he says, "I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses." This steward resolved to make no effort to retain the stewardship in the only way by which it could be retained, to beg; he therefore resolved permanently to forfeit his lord's favour and to win the favour of his lord's debtors at his lord's expense. Seeing that the only way by which he can get right with his master is to beg, and he is ashamed to do that,

he turns his back upon his master, and he says, I will make no effort to retain the stewardship, but I will court the favour of my lord's debtors, and if he puts me out they will take me in.

There is a terrible temptation sometimes comes to the minister of the gospel to please his Lord's debtors, instead of pleasing His Lord. If there are members of other churches here, I beg of you, do not too readily find fault with your pastor. Go home and pray for him, and remember he has the hardest task of any man on earth. It is harder to be a minister of the gospel in our day, than to be anything else in the world. It never was more difficult to be true to one's trust. I can fancy that all heaven waits expectantly, in suspense, when a man is brought to the necessity of making that decision, when he says, "I am resolved what to do." What will he do? Will he beg? Alas, No! How terrible is the story which follows.

"He called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil." The debtor did not dispute his obligation at all. He was even more honest than the steward. And the steward said, "I will give you a discount. Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. I will cut the bill in two." That is my old deacon down at the corner grocery store! "Sit down quickly, and write fifty. You need not pay an hundred measures of oil." Then said he to another, "And how much owest thou?" And he said, "An hundred measures of wheat." To him he said, "I will give you twenty percent. discount. Sit down quickly, and write fourscore.

My brethren that is just what the modern pulpit is doing to-day. It is reducing the standard everywhere. Instead of calling men to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is promising them a discount on their obligation to Almighty God—"Write fifty, write fourscore." The popular man to-day is the man who makes light of the Word of God, and of the solemn obligations which this Word imposes upon those who believe in the Lord Jesus; and of the solemn warnings it issues to the ungodly.

Now what followed? "The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." How are we to understand it? I think you have in the following verses the most ironical statement of the Scripture, the most mordant, biting, sarcasm that ever was uttered: "The lord commended the unjust steward . . . the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Are they? That passage is quoted, I know, frequently, as an excuse for the stupidity of the average Christian, and we are told that the worldly wise are so much wiser than we are. Are they? They are in their own estimation. For a superlatively satisfied generation, commend me to this one. The children of this world were always wiser than the children of light, in their own estimation. But put beside it the fact that, this same Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Did He mean that having come to be a light in the world, the children of light were still to abide in darkness? "The holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation," "The fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." Are we to believe that God's sending His Son to be the Light of the World; giving us His Word to make us wise; sending His Spirit to enlighten our minds and to interpret the Scripture,—that the result of all this is that the children of light are really not children of light, but in comparison with natural men, only fools? I do not believe the children of

this world are wiser in their generation than children of light; nor do I think Jesus intended us to so understand His saying.

The great Teacher now makes application of the parable: "I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. But do not come knocking at my door. You have turned your back upon God, you have chosen the service of mammon, you have made your choice; and it is a final one. And when the transient character of it all appears, and when the unrighteous mammon fails, then let them receive you into eternal tabernacles." Is there anything in Scripture to support that? Did He not say to Israel, "Where are the gods which thou hast made? Let them arise and save thee, in the time of thy distress." Many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, open unto us, and He shall answer and say unto you I know you not whence ye are."

But historically, is there anything to support that view? What was the complaint which Jesus registered against these very Pharisees? He said, "For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother . . . but ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free: And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother." That is to say, Jesus said to the Pharisees, "The Word of God says that a man ought to support his father and his mother. That is what honour the Lord with thy substance means. But you tell him if he turns his property over to the temple and calls it Corban, a gift, he can plead poverty and say he gave it all to religious purposes, and you make the Word of God of none effect." That is the complaint that Jesus made against the Pharisees, that instead of paying an hundred measures of oil and wheat, they were always saying, Write fourscore, Write fifty, winning the favour of the world by turning their back upon God. And Jesus said, If a man makes that choice, he must abide by it: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

Let us see if the context bears out that interpretation, because it is the most solemn word, in my judgment, in the whole New Testament. I never read this sixteenth chapter of Luke without trembling. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteousness mammon—remember, Jesus is now speaking directly, and He is not commending the steward's unfaithfulness—if therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" Then observe this passage, "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." The steward must either be true to his lord, or else fall into the hands of his lord's debtors—one or the other.

We come now to the verse which has led me to this interpretation: "And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him." And Jesus said, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men—you are the very people I have been talking about—but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God." And then He proceeds to say, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." What does He mean but this: "I have authorized no steward of mine to discount your bill. If you owe one hundred measures of oil, it will be an hundred measures of oil you will pay; if an hundred measures of wheat, it will be an hundred measures of wheat you will pay: 'It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.'"

And then He draws the curtain and gives us a glimpse of the other world. And yonder in the other world is the man who made choice of the unrighteous mammon, and he lifts up his eyes being in torments. He discloses one who was not ashamed to beg, and he is in Abraham's bosom. And between the two a

great gulf is fixed, but it is too late—to late—for the man who was ashamed to beg to change his decision. Now he begs that Lazarus should be sent to dip his finger in water and cool his tongue, but he is told that his choice is irrevocable: "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things—you made your choice, you must abide by it—and Lazarus evil things."

I do not want to press the details of the parable too far, but this man is concerned about somebody who still lives, and he is yonder in that state of hopelessness with respect to himself, from which there is no recovery. But he says, "If I may have no relief for myself, I have five brethren, send Lazarus to them." What are you going to make of that? Is there penitence beyond? Does it mean that when a man has utterly lost his chance of heaven, that then he is consumed with a desire for the salvation for some which he has left behind? Is there compassion in yonder place of torment? And if not, why did this lost soul fear the coming of others to that place of torment? Abraham answered, Their account has been rendered; they know what they owe; they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. "And he said, Nay father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." And the answer is, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

What honor this parable puts upon God's word, even upon that part whose inspiration is now so generally denied. "Moses and the prophets"! What finality it ascribes to the decision of that Word! Who has such reason to fear hell as those who say there is no hell, and who say to sinners, "Write fifty"? Is this the hell of an unfaithful prophet? Does the blind guide fear a hotter hell by the presence of those whom he has misled?

I come to you this evening, to try to be faithful to you, and to ask this question, "How much owest thou unto my Lord?" For I must tell you in the name of the Lord, as I tell my own heart, that what you and I owe to God will have to be paid. There is no discount, there is no escaping our obligation by any means whatsoever. "How much owest thou unto my lord?" Had I time this evening to lead your thought into the natural world, and to show you how inexorably the law of God operates in that realm, you would discover that a hundred measures of oil must always be paid; that there is no way by which a man may escape the consequences of wrong-doing: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." You and I are like these debtors who owed much to their Lord; for there is not one of us here this evening who is not deeply in debt to God. The debtor was more honest, I have said, than the steward. Each of them instantly admitted his obligation and asked for no discount. For I have observed that the man who professes no religion invariably admits his indebtedness. It is professed stewards who change the account. I trust there are many here this evening ready to say, "After all, in the secret of my own heart, when I come to consider my relationship to God, I know that I am a sinner; I know that I have not paid my way, and I know that I cannot dig." I rejoice to be able to say I am authorized to tell you that no man who is not ashamed to beg need be put out of the stewardship. The Lord Jesus came and died at the place called Calvary to pay your debt and mine. There is no other way by which God's books can be balanced. We cannot make up the deficiency; only the blood of Jesus can wash our sins away. And I tell you this evening in His name, that unless you beg for mercy—if there is an unconverted man or woman here—unless you beg for mercy, you will find yourself just where this unjust steward in the parable found himself, on the wrong side of the terrible gulf, which forever must separate the soul from God.

What choice shall we make this evening? "How much owest thou unto my Lord?" I do not know how much it is, but however much it may be, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." But every man and every woman who rejects the divine reckoning, who refuses to accept that divine adjustment of his account, will have to meet the consequences in the realm beyond. May God help us this evening to respond to His call, and beg for mercy at His hand: "God be merciful to me a sinner." Thus may we find eternal life, and be established in the stewardship of knowledge of His redeeming grace for ever.

ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Dr. Riley's Addresses.—Friday, 3.00 and 8.00 p.m. Saturday, 8.00 p.m. Sunday, 11.00 a.m. and 7.00 p.m., and in the afternoon (see newspapers for hour).

"Is Man A Developed Monkey? or Should We Longer Tolerate the Teaching of Evolution?"

Monday and Tuesday, 3.00 p.m. and 8 p.m.. See Saturday's newspapers for subjects.

At the time of going to press Dr. Riley fears he will have to conclude his mission Tuesday evening, but many are hoping and praying that he may find it possible to continue till Friday.

The "Open" Meeting of the Women's Home Mission Board Thursday, March 15th, 10.15 a.m. to 3.00 p.m., Parkdale Baptist Church, corner Queen and Callendar. Bring sandwiches. Our hostesses provide hot tea and coffee. Come! These meetings always bring a blessing.

This Week's Witness.—The sermon this week consists of an interpretation of the parable of the unjust steward which is different from that which is generally accepted. Though preached some weeks ago, it is published at the request of many in order to afford opportunity for a careful study of the subject.

Weekly Offering Coupon Books.—Our books expire the last Sunday in March. New books are being prepared. It is hoped that every member of the church will become a weekly offering subscriber. Please give your name and pledge to the church office. Regular subscribers who desire to increase their subscriptions are requested to advise the office at once that the change may be made in the new books.

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The Church Calendar

Sunday. For week beginning Sunday, March 11th, 1923.

10.00—**Prayer Service** in the Church Parlor, Mr. George Greenway.

10.30—**Communion Service.**

11.00—**Public Worship.** Dr. Riley will preach.

3.00—**The Bible School** will meet.

In auditorium Dr. Riley will speak.

6.00—**Prayer Meeting** in Church Parlor.

7.00—**Public Worship.** Dr. Riley will preach. Baptism will be administered.

Monday and Tuesday—3.00 and 8.00. Dr. W. B. Riley will speak.

7.00 to 8.00. Prayer in the parlor.

Wednesday—7.15. Junior Service.

Thursday and Saturday, 8 o'clock, Prayer in parlor.

The Parliament Street Branch, 250 Parliament Street—Sunday: 3.00—Bible School. 7.00 Evangelistic Service, conducted by W. L. McKay.

Wednesday, 8.00, Prayer Meeting. Friday, 7.15, Junior Service.