

Rebukes to Israel's Religious Leaders

The Good Samaritan and
The Unjust Steward

*“Jesus rejoiced in
spirit, and said, I
thank thee, O
Father, Lord of
heaven and earth,
that thou hast hid
these things from
the wise and
prudent, and hast
revealed them
unto babes.”*

—Luke 10:21

MANY OF THE RICH TREAS-

ures of truth revealed by Jesus were set forth by him in response to controversial questions asked by the religious leaders of his day. Having the ability to read their hearts, he also drew important lessons from their hypocritical practices. The Master did not respond to the Jewish religious leaders

simply to level criticism against them. Rather, he did so to point out to the people that in order for them to follow the God of their forefathers, they must think and act very differently from those who

at that time were sitting “in Moses’ seat.” (Matt. 23:2) The two parables of our lesson—The Good Samaritan and The Unjust Steward—are both examples of Jesus’ teachings in this regard. They also convey lessons which are important for consecrated footstep followers of Jesus at the present time.

The parable of the good samaritan, as well as the circumstances surrounding it, are recorded in Luke 10:25-37. Beginning with verse 25, the account states that “a certain lawyer”—probably a Levite—“stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Here the “temptation” was to induce Jesus to say something that could be misconstrued as being against the Law given to Israel by Moses.

JESUS’ RESPONSE TO THE LAWYER

Jesus, however, turned the question back to the lawyer, asking him what the Law said. (vs. 26) The lawyer was well acquainted with the Law, and he quoted Moses’ own summation of it—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.” (vs. 27; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18) Jesus replied to the lawyer, “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”—Luke 10:28; Lev. 18:5

Jesus knew that God had promised life to anyone who could keep the Law inviolate. By answering the lawyer’s question in this way, the religious rulers could not accuse him of setting aside the teachings of Moses. Jesus knew, of course, that the lawyer could not actually gain eternal life by his attempts to keep the Law. This was not the fault of

the Law, but was due to the imperfection of the people—including the religious leaders—resulting from original sin. As Paul explained, the Law was designed to give life, but failed only because of the inability of fallen humans to measure up to its requirements.—Rom. 7:10-14

SIMILAR ENCOUNTER WITH YOUNG RULER

Jesus, reading the lawyer's heart, knew that he was not sincerely inquiring the way of life. Had he been, doubtless the Master would have directed his mind beyond the Law as a source of life. He did do this in the case of the rich young ruler who asked him essentially the same question as did the lawyer. (Matt. 19:16-26; Luke 18:18-30) In answer to the young man's question, Jesus said, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."—Matt. 19:17

Then the young man asked, "Which?" Jesus quoted some of the Ten Commandments, and also the one, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The young man claimed that he had been keeping these commandments, and evidently he had been sincerely trying to do so. (vss. 18-20) Mark's account informs us that Jesus loved this young man, and replying to him said, "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me."—Mark 10:21

Because this young man was earnestly seeking the way of life, Jesus showed his love by introducing him to the only way that would be open during the Gospel Age. It was to be a costly, narrow, and difficult way. It was a way to life that would lead into sacrificial death, as symbolized by the cross. The young

man, having great possessions, did not find it in his heart to make such a great sacrifice as outlined by the Master, so he went away sorrowful. However, Jesus did present the opportunity to him, and even emphasized the heavenly nature of the life the young man would receive if he accepted the Master's invitation and proved faithful unto death. "Thou shalt have treasure in heaven," Jesus said.—Matt. 19:21

"WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?"

In the case of the lawyer who asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life, he could find no fault with the reply. Indeed, the Master had confirmed his "reading" of the Law, and he was of those who professed great loyalty to its teachings. However, wishing perhaps to justify himself even further in the sight of his friends, he asked Jesus for a clarification of the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," and asked, "Who is my neighbour?"—Luke 10:29

It was in response to this question that Jesus related the parable of the good samaritan. In this parable, a "certain man" traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho "fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead." (vs. 30) Then a "certain priest," traveling the same route, noticed the robbed and wounded man, but instead of stopping to assist the unfortunate one, "passed by on the other side." "Likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side."—vss. 31,32

Here were two people who, according to their standing as religious servants, *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) should have shown compassion for the robbed and beaten man, regardless of who he may have been, but they did not. They “passed by on the other side,” as though to ease their conscience by not getting too close a look at the suffering man.

THE SAMARITAN’S EXAMPLE

Continuing in the parable, there was “a certain Samaritan” who, “as he journeyed,” also came across the man who had been robbed and nearly killed. The Israelites despised the Samaritans, who, so far as they were concerned, were not God’s people at all. This made the lesson of the parable all the more pointed to those to whom it was first addressed, for this despised Samaritan did show compassion for the man lying almost dead by the roadside. He bound up the man’s wounds, “pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” He even arranged for the innkeeper to continue caring for the man, promising to pay any balance of the bill when he returned that way.—Luke 10:33-35

After relating the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer which one of these three men was a “neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves.” There was only one answer the lawyer could give, which was the man who showed mercy—he was the real neighbor. Then Jesus said to the lawyer, “Go, and do thou likewise.” In other words, Jesus told the lawyer that if he manifested the same spirit of compassion and helpfulness toward those in need, as the Samaritan did, he would be fulfilling the commandment to love his neighbor as himself.—vss. 36,37

HOW TO GAIN LIFE

When the lawyer quoted the Law correctly, Jesus said to him, “This do, and thou shalt live.” (vs. 28) Jesus did not imply by this that the lawyer could gain eternal life apart from the provisions of the ransom. It was simply that he did not consider it the due time to explain the divine plan further to this man who was merely seeking to find something against him.

No one can gain life, either in this age or in the age to come, apart from faith in the shed blood of the Redeemer. However, as James wrote, “Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:17,20,26) This means that one’s life must be brought into conformity with faith in the ransom through obedience to divine law. As we have seen, in the present age it is God’s will that believers lay down their lives in sacrifice, following in the footsteps of Jesus. It is thus that they demonstrate their faith.

The great principles of the Law given by Moses are binding upon these, and in addition Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” (John 13:34; 15:12,17) Jesus’ love for his disciples, and indeed for the whole world, led him to lay down his life in sacrifice on their behalf, and his faithful followers are “planted together in the likeness of his death.” (Rom. 6:5) In this way they demonstrate their wholehearted love for the Heavenly Father, and for Christ Jesus.

As we have noted, to the rich young ruler whom Jesus invited to give up all that he had in sacrifice, Jesus said he would receive “treasure in heaven.” The “call” of the present age is a heavenly one.

(Heb. 3:1) Those who meet the conditions of this call by being faithful unto death will attain “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) They will be made like Jesus and share with him the place which he went away to prepare.—John 14:1-3; I John 3:1,2

ATTAINING LIFE IN THE NEXT AGE

During the next age—the time of Christ’s Messianic kingdom—those who attain eternal life will also need to accept the provision of life made for them through the redemptive work of Jesus. They will also have to conform to the laws of God as they will be expressed through the agencies of the kingdom. God’s Law, in principle, never changes, so during the Messianic kingdom it will be essential for all who attain life eternal to love the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and also to love their neighbors as themselves, even as set forth by Moses, and reaffirmed by the Master.

All of this is implied in Jesus’ statement to the lawyer to the effect that if he kept God’s Law as it had been expressed by the great lawgiver, Moses, he would have “eternal life.” Jesus did not then explain that a truly favorable opportunity to do this would not be offered until the Messianic age, during the “times of restitution.” (Acts 3:21) The lawyer was not then ready to receive further truths than Jesus imparted to him. We can now rejoice, however, to realize that all will be given an opportunity and the needed assistance, when the due time comes, to practice the divine law of love. All who will live forever on the earth will become true neighbors to one another in a worldwide paradise.

THE UNJUST STEWARD

The parable of the unjust steward is recorded in Luke 16:1-12. It conveys an important lesson to all who are endeavoring to please God rather than men. In it, Jesus tells of a certain rich man who had received a report that his steward was unfaithful in the handling of his financial affairs. The rich man informed the unfaithful steward that his services were to be terminated, although he was allowed to continue temporarily—perhaps until another man could be trained for the position.

All stewards of that time had full authority to do with their master's goods as they chose and deemed wise. This arrangement was predicated on the assumption that they were honest and trustworthy, and would in no way misuse the wealth of which they were given such complete charge. This is expressed by Paul when he wrote, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."—I Cor. 4:2

The record states that the steward of the parable was unable to work, and too proud to beg, so he devised a scheme which he believed would afford him some degree of security after his stewardship was terminated. He called in one after another of the rich man's debtors and authorized them to make drastic reductions in the amounts they owed. Thus he used his position of authority to promote his own interests, for he believed his action would cause his master's debtors to feel very friendly toward him, so that when he was finally removed from his stewardship they would take him into their houses and care for his needs.

In the preceding chapter of Luke, there are three other parables recorded, all of which were addressed to the scribes and Pharisees (see May 2015 issue). The introduction to this parable reads, “He said also unto his disciples” (Luke 16:1), indicating that at least certain parts of it were to have a special meaning for them, consequently for all his true followers. In examining the details of the parable we will endeavor to distinguish between the lessons intended for the scribes and Pharisees and those which applied to the disciples.

LESSONS FOR SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

The unjust steward of the parable would seem to represent the scribes and the Pharisees as the religious leaders of Israel, since like them, he was about to lose his stewardship. They sat in Moses’ seat, and until they were cast off served as God’s stewards in handling the religious interests of the nation. At the time the parable was given, the scribes and Pharisees were in much the same position as the unjust steward. Jesus had served notice that they were to be replaced, although they were continuing to serve. “The law and the prophets were until John,” Jesus explained, “since that time the kingdom of God is preached.”—vs. 16

While John the Baptist was the last of the prophets, the age of the Law and the prophets was continuing through a transition period, so Jesus still recognized the position of the scribes and Pharisees. They were not fully aware of the great change that was soon to occur, although they seemed to sense that Jesus directed the parable against them. The record states, “The Pharisees

also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.”—vs. 14

Then Jesus impressed the lesson upon the Pharisees, saying, “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.” (vs. 15) In reducing the amounts owed by his master’s debtors, the unjust steward endeavored to make himself “highly esteemed among men.” Jesus told Israel’s religious leaders that was what they were endeavoring to do, thus identifying them as being represented by the unjust steward.

“CHILDREN OF LIGHT”

In relating the parable, Jesus said that “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” (vs. 8) It was the course taken by the unjust steward that Jesus is using here to illustrate the wisdom of the “children of this world.” This would indicate that the scribes and Pharisees, as the religious leaders of Israel and supposedly “children of light,” while selfishly endeavoring to justify themselves before men, were not as wise as this steward. Indeed, until Jesus came on the scene to begin the work of a new age, these religious leaders, as God’s representatives, were to be his light-bearers in the world.

The parable states that the “lord,”—that is, the rich man—commended the action of the unjust steward. The Greek word here translated “commended” would be better translated “applauded.” (vs. 8, *Emphatic Diaglott*) This simply means that the rich man recognized the shrewdness of his

steward in thus taking care of his own interests while he still had an opportunity to do so. The moral aspect of what he did is not here under consideration.

CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD WISER

The unjust steward in his shrewdness was like “the children of this world,” and so far as his own interests were concerned he acted more wisely than the scribes and Pharisees were doing. Of them Jesus said, “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”—Matt. 23:2-4

This indicates that in this respect the scribes and Pharisees were pursuing a course quite opposite to that of the unjust steward. Instead of lightening the burdens of the people, they were increasing them. They desired the plaudits of men, just as Jesus had explained, but were not using even ordinary worldly wisdom to obtain them.

“All their works,” Jesus said, “they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ.”—vss.5-8

The unjust steward of the parable realized that he could not gain the favor of men by using his

master's wealth for himself. The scribes and Pharisees did use their position of trust to impress the people with their greatness, but by increasing their burdens and making gain for themselves as a result, they did not gain the respect of the common people. It is no wonder that Jesus indicated the unjust steward was wiser than "the children of light."

LESSONS FOR THE DISCIPLES

Having pointed out to the scribes and Pharisees their lack of wisdom in view of the position in which they would soon find themselves. Jesus turned to his disciples, and according to the *King James Version*, said, "I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail [*Strong's*: cease or die], they may receive you into everlasting habitations."—Luke 16:9

New Creatures in Christ Jesus are not to use their stewardship to make friends for themselves from among their fellowmen. They are to sacrifice every self-interest so that the Lord's name might be glorified. We have given our "all" to the Lord, and he has made us stewards over it to use in his service. In verse 9, the phrase "they may receive you into everlasting habitations" seems to refer to the Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus, who will receive us at the end of our earthly course, if we are faithful, to "an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."—II Cor. 5:1

The phrase in verse 9 in which Jesus instructs his disciples to "make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" does not seem to fit the promise of being received into "everlasting habitations" if faithful in so doing. However, by

looking at verses 10 and 11 we get an insight as to what the Lord meant. These verses read: “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 unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?”—Luke 16:10,11

UNRIGHTEOUS MAMMON AND TRUE RICHES

The “least” and the “much” referred to in verse 10 are described in verse 11 as “the unrighteous mammon” and the “true riches.” “Who will commit to your trust the true riches?” Jesus asked, if you have been unfaithful in the use of the “least,” “the unrighteous mammon.”

The “unrighteous mammon” would represent all the things we once called our own, but have now dedicated to the Lord. While they are “unrighteous,” imperfect, they are acceptable to God through Christ Jesus. Having devoted our all to the Lord, he has made us stewards of what now belongs to him, to be used in the furtherance of his cause, not our own. Based on this understanding, Jesus’ instruction in verse 9 that we make “friends of the mammon of unrighteousness” simply means that we are to be faithful in our stewardship over earthly goods, the “least” of true value, just as we should be over spiritual treasures of eternal worth.

These “least” things may vary in value, as illustrated by the widow’s mite on the one hand, to considerable wealth on the other—from small abilities to outstanding talents along one or more lines. However, in any case they are still “least” as compared with the “true riches,” “the mysteries of

God,” the truth, over which we have also been made stewards. (I Cor. 4:1) These “true riches” are the “much” entrusted to the Lord’s people, and over which we are admonished to be faithful.

Unlike the “least” things which we have dedicated to the Lord, “the mysteries of God” never did belong to us. The Truth belongs to the Lord, and is entrusted to us for our sanctification and to use in furthering the interests of his cause in the earth. Of what greater worth are these true riches than the meager offering we make to the Lord when we give him our all. How important it is that we be faithful in discharging the responsibilities of our stewardship over the Truth.

Our stewardship of the “least” and the “much”—the “unrighteous mammon” and the “true riches”—runs more or less concurrently. When responding to the call of God we dedicate our all to his service. This answer of a good conscience is a demonstration of our appreciation of the Truth, the “true riches.” As, day by day, we use faithfully the “least” things, the “unrighteous mammon” which we have given to the Lord, our appreciation of the “true riches” increases, and we become better qualified to exercise our stewardship over them. On the other hand, unfaithfulness in the “least” things could lead to the loss of the “true riches” entirely.

To have our stewardship of the “true riches” withdrawn would lead to a great loss in the future. Jesus explains this: “If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?” (Luke 16:12) “The mysteries of the kingdom” over which we have been made stewards belong to the Lord, not to us. However, if

we are faithful stewards, we will receive rewards which will be our “own.”

BE FAITHFUL STEWARDS

Jesus promised, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) We will not be made stewards over the crown of life. This priceless reward will be our “own” if we are found faithful to receive it. “Glory and honour and immortality” will be the actual possession of those who are faithful stewards over the Truth, the “true riches,” and over the “unrighteous mammon” which they have given to the Lord, and which he now permits them to use in his service.—Rom. 2:7

Thus we see that the parable of the unjust steward conveys a very heart-searching lesson to the followers of Jesus, and at the same time is a condemning depiction of the hypocrisy and injustices of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day who, as a class, were about to lose their stewardship. We have been entrusted with the promotion of the Truth. Let us not betray this trust by endeavoring to gain anything for ourselves from our stewardship.

Only the reasonable necessities of life are to be taken from what we have dedicated to the Lord. This is the teaching and example of Jesus and his apostles. We are not to be “wise” like the unjust steward, and use the “mammon of unrighteousness” to promote our own selfish interests in life. However, we are to be faithful in our stewardship over these temporal things and direct their use toward the development of our New Creature. To the world in general this view and way of life may seem foolish. The treasures we are laying up in

heaven, however, are of far greater value than any advantages we could secure by misusing the perishable “mammon of unrighteousness.”

Paul wrote, “Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.” (I Cor. 4:11-13) Thus does the beloved Paul set forth the cost of faithful stewardship over the mysteries of God. ■