

72. For the spiritually nearsighted

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There are many people who are really nearsighted when it comes to spirituality. They cannot see anything further than their noses in the spiritual realm, rather should I say, they choose not to see the future. They are like an experimental monkey which is given three apples a day for its meal. He eats everything in the morning and starves for the rest of the day instead of eating one apple for each meal.

In chapter 16, Jesus uses one of the most difficult parables to explain His point to us. He teaches us that we sometimes have to learn from even shrewd unbelievers how to be prepared for our eternal future, because the majority of believers tend to put their emphasis on what they can have on earth more than what they can bring to the glory of God eternally.

Then the Lord Jesus goes on to the parable of a spiritually nearsighted rich man who died and ended up in the tormented place. Anyone who is only concerned about what he or she can have on this earth should take this study as a stern warning from the Lord.

A. THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD

Luke 16:1-13 He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. 2 So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' 3 Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' 5 So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' 7 Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' 8 So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. 9 And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. 10 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. 11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? 13 No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

A steward is someone who manages another's wealth like a financial accountant. The most important duty about a steward is that he serves his master faithfully and brings profits to him. But this particular steward forgot that he was a steward and began to act as if he were the owner. He became a "prodigal steward" who wasted his master's wealth. He was about to get fired. Before that happened, he used his position to make allies of the people who owe his master.

Before we decide that he deserved to get fired and should be in a jail, we need to look closely at our own lives. Can we say we have been faithful with all the things our God has given to us? Whether we have much or little, are we good stewards of His riches that He allows us to have on this earth? One day we, too, must give an answer to Him for the way we handle them.

Christian stewardship is more than giving a tithe. What about the rest? Giving God 10 percent of our income is a good way to begin our faithful stewardship. Does it mean that we can waste away the 90% as we please? No, everything belongs to God. We are supposed to be grateful for what He lets us have and use it as He directs.

Instead of taking the crooked steward to jail, this master actually praised him. This parable could be very misleading, if it is misunderstood. How could Jesus use such an obviously dishonest man as an example for His disciples?

Let's see why the master praised him:

1) The steward knew he would be called to account for his life and he took that seriously.

Christians should take seriously the idea that they will be called to account, and that idea can be a joy if we are about our Master's business.

2) He took advantage of his present position to arrange a comfortable future.

Many Christians are not concerned about lost souls in the world. They don't get involved in the work for the Kingdom of God. In other words, they are flat out selfish Christians. If we pursued the Kingdom of God with the same vigor and zeal that the people of this world pursue profits and pleasure, we would live in an entirely different world.

If we are faithful with His riches that He allows us to manage, we will receive His commendation as we enter into heaven and be rewarded. But if we are not faithful, we will lose those blessings, even though we will be saved and enter heaven.

Now I am speaking to those who are blessed with earthly wealth from the Lord. I praise God for you. The Lord entrusted you with that riches so that you can be a wise steward of His goods. But if you are wasting it away for your own pleasure only like this unfaithful steward, one day, you will be accountable for all the wasted resources. Does it mean that you cannot enjoy the riches He entrusted you with? No, that is not what I meant. But if you are not seeking the Kingdom of God through the financial resources you are allowed to have, the Lord will call you and demand you to give Him an account of your stewardship. Take this as a warning.

By the way, you don't have to be rich to be greedy and a slave to money, because the poor can be just as greedy and covetous as the rich person is.

B. THE SPIRITUALLY NEAR SIGHTED PHARISEES

Luke 16:14-17 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. 15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. 16 The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has

been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. 17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

Of course, Jesus was talking about the Pharisees who were standing around and listening to Jesus' teaching and snorting and saying something nasty under their breath. After all, they were the lover of money. And Jesus' teaching had been hitting them right where they hurt the most – their money bags.

C. A BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE THAT STILL STANDS

Luke 16:18 Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.

It seems that this sentence is out of place from the context, but actually it was very relevant during Jesus' time on earth. During that time, some of the Jews were very lax in their views on divorce and remarriage, while others were very strict.

Before we move on to the next, we must apply this to ours. If a person goes through an unbiblical divorce and marries someone else before the spouse who got divorced remarries, that person is committing adultery. Some of you may say, "That is harsh." The Word of God still applies to us whether we like it or not. Remember, the Final Authority?!?!

This chapter 16 can be easily studied in two parts. But to keep what Jesus wanted to show us in context, we must study in one session. In His infinite wisdom, He knew that handling and surrendering the total control of an individual's money to our God is one of the top two difficulties any human faces, the Lord Jesus started His teaching in this chapter with the financial stewardship and accountability to Him and He leads us to our spiritual stewardship to heaven or hell.

D. THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

Luke 16:19-31 "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, 21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 Then 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.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' 27 Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' 29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

Perhaps people don't want to take hell seriously because they view death as the finality. But in truth, it is the beginning of their eternal life in heaven or hell. To better

grasp what's at stake in eternity, and to better appreciate Jesus' rescue of us, let's look at what the Bible reveals about death and what awaits us beyond the grave.

Jesus describes Hades – a.k.a. Sheol in the OT, which was the common place of the dead. Some who were in Hades rest in comfort – known as Abraham's bosom, but others are in the fires of torment. However, Hades is not the Lake of Fire – what we usually think of as Hell, referred to in Revelation 20:15, and called Gehenna in the OT. Instead, Hades is a "waiting place" until the day of final judgment.

When people die, only their bodies go into the grave. At a funeral it is merely the physical shell we see lying in the casket. The real person, the soul/spirit, has already departed to either a place of Hades or heaven, depending on the person's spiritual decision he or she made while that person was alive.

Ephesians 4:8-10 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

At Christ's ascension, Jesus took the dead saint spirits from "Abraham's bosom" to "the third heaven" to the realm where God lives according to these verses. Since then, believers' souls/spirits go immediately to be with Christ, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies when the rapture happens. Later, at the final judgment, the bodies of unbelievers will be resurrected and joined with their souls/spirits to face an eternity in hell.

The bitter root of death reaches all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve first planted its seed in the soil of humanity when they sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit. As a result of their disobedience, sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men.

From the moment we're born, our biological clocks start ticking away toward death. Death steadily, inevitably approaches, and its sheer mystery terrifies many of us. You might be the one who is fearful of death. Thankfully, what we just read shines a light into the afterlife, showing us what happens when we die.

Did God condemn the rich man to this horrible fate because he was wealthy? Did Lazarus receive bliss because he was poor? No, Scripture says that where we place our faith determines our destinies. The rich man trusted the things of this world and cared nothing for the things of God's kingdom. Lazarus' faith in God is revealed in his name, which means "God is my help."

Here are four common rationalizations that try to discount the severity of hell:

1) Hell will be a relief compared to the suffering we endure on earth.

Absolutely not. For the unbelievers, the life on earth is the only heaven they would have. Hell has unimaginable torment waiting for them for their own choice.

2) All this stuff about hell is based on imaginative fears. When we die, we will feel and know nothing.

If you are right, Christians don't have a problem. But if the Bible is right, you will be in unchangeable torment.

3) Hell won't be so bad. I'll be there with all my buddies!

We don't see the rich man resting in the companionship of his friends like Lazarus rests in the bosom of Abraham. He suffers alone and the most of all, he is in utter isolation from God.

4) After I've been in hell for a while, somebody will pray me out.

No bridge exists to the other side, no purgatory, no reincarnation, no chance for relief. Once you are in, you are in for eternity.

If you think lightly of hell, then you will think lightly of the cross. If you think little of the sufferings of lost souls, then you will soon think little of the Savior who delivers us from them. Wrong, very wrong!!!

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Don't be spiritually nearsighted. What we do on earth often results in eternity.

2) Serving two masters – God or money – is an impossibility. We need to serve our one and only Lord Jesus.

3) The person who ignores the Word of God in life will not be ignored by the God of the Word in eternity.