

What Does God Really Want? (Part 4)

Faithful Stewardship

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I mentioned at the very beginning of the "All In All" sermon that I gave during the Days of Unleavened Bread that it had been seven years almost to the day that I first gave that sermon. There is for me a far more significant anniversary coming up just after Pentecost. That will be the 38th anniversary of my first sermonette that I gave in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in June 1962.

The reason this came up is because the subject of that sermonette—and much of today's sermon—are going to be mirror images of one another. That is, they are going to be exact opposites. The 1962 sermonette that I gave focused largely on what God *does not* want. The sermon today will focus largely on what God *really* wants, but both of them are centered on the same set of scriptures commonly called "The Parable of the Unjust Steward."

Christian stewardship is a subject that the ministry is speaking about very frequently, but at the same time, we hardly ever use the term. We speak on this by informing members of their responsibilities to God and to each other. A steward is a person into whose trust responsibility has been given.

The word "steward" in its modern usage has become a title of a person who has some measure of authority similar to an attendant, a foreman, a supervisor, or a manager. A steward is often perceived as a person employed to wait on others or to provide some sort of a service. On airplanes today, the flight attendants were formerly called stewardesses. In carrying out their responsibility in the airplane, they represent the airlines in a public relations capacity, and at the same time they attend to passengers' needs during the flight. This carries with it a certain limited measure of authority that lasts as long as they are on the plane and doing their job.

When I worked in the steel mill, it was unionized by the United Steel Workers of America, and each shop had a union steward whose job it was to serve the members in matters pertaining to discipline or disputes with the company management.

Roget's Thesaurus lists "steward" under *nine* different categories where it is used as a noun. They include: an agent, an attendant (aviation), financial officer, guardian, majordomo, manager, provider, and sailor. As a verb, it is only listed under one category: manage. Stewardship, as a noun, is listed under directorship, management, protectorship, and vigilance, which is kind of interesting. Pay attention to that one—vigilance.

Not all of these synonyms fit our responsibilities to God and to each other, but agent, attendant, guardian, director, manager, provider, and protector certainly do. And even though a steward may have very great authority (this is important), he is also always, in the Bible, seen as somebody who is *under* authority, and entrusted with something that belongs to somebody else.

Turn to Genesis 13. We are going to pick up two verses here to lay a foundation.

Genesis 13:1-2 And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.

I just want to pick up the thought that Abraham was very rich.

Genesis 15:1-2 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?

This is the very first place in the Bible that the word *steward* appears. As we are going to see, it tends to reveal a position of great authority, one in which there was a great deal of reliance placed, and responsibility given.

It is also interesting that in this very context, in other Bibles the word *steward* is translated as *master*. If you feed that in this "What will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the *master* of my home is this Eliezer," other Bibles translate it as *possessor*. "The possessor of my home is this Eliezer." He was the steward. What it indicates in either case is that Abraham is pointing out that this Eliezer was his heir. Isaac was not yet born. Now he was heir to this great exceeding wealth of "the father of the faithful"—Abraham.

The reason this came up is because of what immediately preceded it. Abraham had given tithes to Melchizedek, and he had told the king of Sodom that he was not going to take one penny from him. And then immediately Abram turns to God, you might say, and says, "What are you going to give me? I'm not going to take anything from these people. What will You give me, seeing that I am childless?"

Now the steward is not the owner, but he is nonetheless entrusted with some very serious responsibilities. Just the fact that he was supervisor of Abraham's vast wealth, and so highly respected that he was Abraham's heir, certainly indicates that those so named as stewards in the Bible are individuals of considerable ability, and also trustworthy conduct as well.

Turn now to Genesis 24. We will continue this story of this first steward.

Genesis 24:1-2 And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray you, your hand under my thigh.

This begins a sequence of events that is going to show us the considerable weight of responsibility that Abraham put on this man. I mean, it was very far-reaching, and included things beyond Abraham's death.

Genesis 24:3-10 And I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that you shall not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But you shall go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said unto him,

Peradventure [perhaps] the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring your son again unto the land from whence you came? And Abraham said unto him, Beware you that you bring not my son thither again. The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spoke unto me, and that swore unto me, saying, Unto your seed will I give this land: he shall send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow you, then you shall be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning that matter. And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed: for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor.

We are going to look a little bit further at this steward because it points out responsibilities that stewards can be given. In verses 26 and 27 we will see a little bit of this steward's personality and character. This happens later in the sequence of events.

Genesis 24:26-27 And the man [the steward] bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren.

That gives us some sort of an idea of his religious position in relation to Abraham and the true God. He worshipped the true God.

Genesis 24:52 And it came to pass, that when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth.

Confirmation there.

Genesis 24:33 And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on.

Genesis 24:56 And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the LORD has prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master.

He not only worshipped the true God, but those last two verses tend to show his dedication and his humility and his loyalty in serving Isaac, and of course Abraham as well. We especially have to consider Isaac here, because now Isaac is born, and as a matter of fact he is probably about sixty years old at this time, and Isaac had displaced the steward as the heir.

Now what would that normally do to a human being who had served his master well and thought that he was in a position to inherit everything, and then the master turns around and makes his son the heir? A lot of stories have been written about that kind of a circumstance, and the hatred and the jealousy that such a thing tends to create in the one who is set aside. He could say, "All these years I served him, and then what happens? He puts the brat into this position of responsibility." He could say this, but he did not. He loyally served Isaac in the same way that he served Abraham. This is a wonderful example of what a steward should be.

To give you a little bit of an idea of the authority that a steward could be entrusted with, and in order to get the full impact, you have to understand that at the time this occurred Abraham thought that he was near death. Actually he lived on probably about another fifteen years. But at the time, he thought that he was near death. It even says in verse 1, "Abraham was old, and well stricken in age." He thought he was about to die.

The steward was not only given the responsibility of finding a wife for the heir, but you have to also consider the sensitivity with which he was going to have to handle this thing. Not only was he entrusted with the weighty responsibility of finding Isaac a wife *only* (that is important) amongst

Abraham's family. It could not be any old gal that might be willing. It had to be somebody particularly from Abraham's family. He also, as verse 10 says, was carrying with him ten camels loaded with a great amount of wealth.

Now that was not all of Abraham's wealth. That was only what he took on this particular trip. The steward not only had control of those ten camels and could spend it as he saw fit, he also was supervisor of *all* of Abraham's wealth. That is a pretty good deal of authority. And then comes, in a way to me, the coup de grace here. He asked Abraham, "What if you die? Should I take Isaac to live with your people?"

Do you see what is implied here? Even after Abraham died, and Isaac was about sixty years old, the steward had authority over where Isaac could live! How many of you men at age sixty would want one of the bosses—your father's employees—to tell you where you could live and whom you could marry? Not very many. But the steward had that responsibility.

Abraham said, "No! He is only to live here, and that's it! And he's only to have a bride from my family. And that's it!" So what the steward had to do was to carry out loyally and right to the "T" what Abraham said. And even if Abraham died, nothing was to change. Of course, it did not happen that way, but the steward had the authority to resist Isaac in where Isaac wanted to live.

That will give you some sort of an idea of the things that could be entrusted to a steward, or you might say simply, to an employee. Or we might call it "a servant." That is a great deal to be entrusted with.

Now with most things in life, and in the Bible, there is a balancing factor, and I think that this is kind of good. It is good that we understand this, and that we also never let this slip from our minds, because the word "steward" in English has very humble origins that will work to produce humility if we allow it. If it produces humility within us, then also it will produce wisdom.

The word "steward" in English means "keeper of the sty." Do you know what a sty is? It is a pig pen. So on the one hand, you have a steward who can be seen as bearing great responsibility, great authority that is far reaching, and on the other hand he keeps pigs, just to keep us in the right attitude. This is because a steward is an attendant. He waits upon, he serves,

he supervises, he protects, he manages ...pigs. It is good for a steward always to remember that his responsibility has very humble, humiliating circumstances as well.

Now God, remember, is the Creator. And in a sense, physically, to the crowning achievement of His creation—man—He has given dominion. So man, as God's agent over the physical creation, has been called upon by God to have dominion over all of the lower levels of life, and over material things as well. But he must never allow himself to sink to their level, because if he sinks he himself becomes hardly better than what he is supposed to be serving: pigs. He becomes a beast.

Let us put a reminder in here. We are always to remember that we are stewards. We are not owners. We—all of us—take care of that which belongs to another. The creation belongs to God. This is a very difficult concept for those to accept who are walking by sight because human nature almost always thinks of and speaks of that which is *mine*: *my* money; *my* house; *my* car; *my* clothing.

Turn to I Samuel 25 and I will show you a very clear example of this.

I Samuel 25:2-3 And there was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. Now the name of the man was Nabal.

I Samuel 25:9 And when David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased.

Now listen to the way Nabal answered David's servants.

I Samuel 25:10 And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse?

He knew who David was. He knew that David had been anointed king by Samuel. There is no doubt at all about that.

I Samuel 25:10-11 There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?

What we saw there was typical of man, of the way he looks upon possessions. That is natural to do, but it is not entirely correct from a biblical perspective, and we have to remember this if things are going to go right in life.

Psalms 50:7-11 Hear, O my people, and I will speak: O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, even your God. [We need to be reminded of this.] I will not reprove you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of your house, nor he goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.

Let us look at one more verse just to reinforce this principle.

Haggai 2:8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts.

What God is saying is that what we possess is only *given*. It is in reality His, and whether converted or unconverted, we are stewards of what He has given to us. Converted or unconverted, it makes no difference. When God gave man dominion over the earth and all the beasts and everything, you see the authority is coming from the real owner and He places it in the hands of a steward. So whether converted or unconverted, the silver is His, the gold is His, the animals are His, the land is His. **Everything** is His.

We belong to Him, but we have been appointed to take care of what He has entrusted to us. That has to be a major guiding point to our lives, to remember that what we have been given never ever really belongs to us **ever**

—from beginning to end. It is owned by somebody else, but we have been entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of it. And so what we are looking at here are verses that show us a higher and greater reality.

It is certainly all right for us to say, "My house, my car," because we have every right and responsibility to work and earn so that we can be entrusted with these things, but always our thinking has to contain that caveat. That caveat is that there is a higher and greater reality, and the reality is that these things really belong to God. He has only empowered us to work for these things, and they are there so that we can work for them and even accumulate them only because He created them, or He has manipulated things so that they become ours.

This is of great importance to the well-being of life, because it is very easy to become so self-centered. We become possessive of these things to our detriment. As Creator, everything belongs to God, and in fact they are merely entrusted to us, to our care, for a period of time. Everything we have, whether it is money, whether it is health, other property, jobs, education, or knowledge, these things have been entrusted to us to use to glorify our Owner.

Turn now to Matthew 25. You see how these things with Eliezer and Abraham (who is a type of God) are beginning to blend into our responsibilities to God.

Matthew 25:14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

Notice: "And delivered unto them his goods." God is the Giver of everything.

Matthew 25:15-18 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability: and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

Is that not becoming plain? The steward receives the lord's gifts. The fellow that was given one talent hid his in the earth. In verse 27 is when God is judging.

Matthew 25:27 You [the one who hid things] ought therefore to have put my money to the exchangers [to the bank or the money changers], and then at my coming I should have received my own with usury.

That makes it very clear. God is pictured as giving the wealth in the first place, and then to make sure that we understand, He tells the unprofitable one that he should have at least put his talent into to the bank so that He, God, could receive back His own with interest.

Now the servant's mistake was in misjudging his master's character, and thus irresponsibly using what had been given to him. So the instruction is clear. We are to understand that God's gifts, whether they are physical or spiritual, are in reality a trust. They are not a possession. And as this parable teaches, this fact lays a serious responsibility upon us to use them faithfully and judiciously, and especially so because of whom they ultimately belong to. We are being judged with what we do with what we have been given.

Let us go to I Corinthians 4:1-2, because this is a considerable responsibility. This is what we are being judged against. What do we do with what has been entrusted to us? What is it that God really wants from a steward above all other things? Well, we find the apostle Paul to tell us.

I Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

We will stop right there for just a second because it is intriguing that the word that is translated there *ministers* is the only place in the entire Bible that that particular word is used, and it tends to show a steward's position very clearly, because that word means "attendant." It means "helper." It means "servant." It means "subordinate." Now here the heart and core of a steward's responsibility is laid bare.

I Corinthians 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

There it is. What does God want from us? What does He really want from us? He wants us to be faithful to what we have been given in the carrying out and the proper use of whatever it is.

In the immediate context here, Paul applies stewardship directly to the ministry. However, be not deceived, because the stewardship principle applies to everybody at its broadest. It applies physically to all of mankind. At its narrowest, it applies to a specific individual who is so named right within a context, like right here. Or a little bit broader, it applies to the ministry. And a little bit broader than that, it applies to anybody who is a servant of Almighty God. At its broadest this encapsulates everybody, but at its most serious it is aimed directly to everybody who has been entrusted by God with what Paul names here: "those who have been entrusted with the mysteries of God."

Have the unconverted been entrusted with the mysteries of God? No! They have only been entrusted with the physical care of the creation of God. You and I have not only been entrusted with the physical care of the creation of God, which includes ourselves, and of course our wives, our husbands, our children, the house that we live in, our automobile, our clothing, and everything that is attached to us in that regard, but it includes something that God has not yet entrusted to the unconverted, and that is—"the mysteries of the Kingdom of God."

We need to think about this in relation to Abraham's servant, because if you think that man was responsible for something that was valuable, I want you to think again about how valuable what has been entrusted to you and me is. What Eliezer was entrusted with is like pennies compared to what has been entrusted to us. It does not even begin to compare. You talk about wealth. It is awesome! It is beyond count. You cannot put enough value on what God has freely given to you and me. How are you taking care of it? Is there as much loyalty as Eliezer had to Abraham? You see there an authority and a loyalty that extended beyond the grave.

We are responsible not only to God, but we are also responsible to each other as well, because as Paul, in another place talking about this same basic subject, says, "We are members one of another," meaning we are all in the same family. We are all in the same body. We are part of the body of Jesus Christ, and part of the responsibility that has been entrusted on each other, to each other, is to be our brother's keeper. We are to love one another, to be kind, to be patient, to be serving, to be doing what we can to help one another, because that is what a steward does. He is always ready to help his boss, and his boss of course, his owner, is God. And so Paul says it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

Other responsibilities undoubtedly may require other qualities but fidelity, faithfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty, reliability, and devotion to duty above all is required of a steward. This is because what has been committed to the stewards of God is so valuable, and also because it is so easy for a steward to appropriate them to his own use.

We just read in Matthew 25 in the Parable of the Talents an example of one that was entrusted with the one talent, of using them to his own ends. In this case he just dug a hole and stuck it in there, and did not use it. So he failed his owner, the master, because he did not bring forth any profit for the owner.

II Timothy 1:13-14 Hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto you keep by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us.

Now what did Timothy have committed to him? What was committed into his trust? It was words. What words? The words that make up the gospel. The words that make up the mystery of God.

Flip back to I Timothy 1. Paul wrote this to the same young man.

I Timothy 1:11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

God committed these things to Paul. He commissioned Paul to be an apostle. He gave him a message that he was to deliver to those who were going to be called. Paul became the instrument through which the same words that God gave to him he then gave to others, including Timothy. That was what was committed to his trust.

By the same sequence of events, these things have been committed to you and me, only it was not through the apostle Paul. It was through Herbert W. Armstrong. It was then through Herbert Armstrong that these words of the apostle Paul were committed to you and me, and of course to all of those who worked under Herbert Armstrong.

Here is another interesting little factor:

II Timothy 1:14 That good thing which was committed unto you keep. . .

It is that word "keep." Ordinarily that word means guard, protect, and that is what it means here. Timothy was to protect. Here we see stewardship in the act of guarding. Remember, there were seven categories that *Roget's Thesaurus* had stewardship listed under. "Protecting" was one of them. We have to protect. We have to guard. It has the sense of a sentry being on duty, or a shepherd guarding sheep from marauders.

Everyone in the body, not just the ministry, has a responsibility to live exercising care to prevent the stealing away of some of the flock. Perhaps, above all, being vigilant, that it does not happen to you. Can you guard, protect your neighbor if you leave yourself wide open for attack? What good is that kind of a sentry? And so we begin to see that if a steward is going to faithfully carry out his responsibility, in one sense his first responsibility is to make sure that he himself does not get swept away by a wave of whatever it might be that will cause his attention to be deflected away so that friends can be stolen away, or family members stolen away.

I once read something that went like this: "Fewer people are argued out of their beliefs than drift away, because they didn't pay attention to their beliefs." They just get swept away in the tide, the spirit that comes out from the world and all of its cultures.

We have to see this again within the context that what has been given to us, committed to us, is **so valuable**. We are entrusted with it, and we have to guard it, as it were, with our life, because *it is right inside you*. You in a sense are the depository of this. It is in your mind, and if you do not protect yourself, you cannot possibly protect anybody else. And this is the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Remember what I said earlier, using Nabal as an illustration: *My house. My sheep. My possessions. My things.* If you go back and check the Parable of the Prodigal Son, you will find that his downfall began when he said, "Give me that portion of good that falls to me." You see, "that is *mine*."

Each step after that came easily as he began using what was entrusted to him for his own pleasure and not somebody else's. His inheritance was simply the illustration. What we have to do to make this applicable to us is to realize that instead of money it is God's Word. It is the gospel. That is what has fallen to us. Now how are we going to spend it, as it were?

The young man went to a far country, which is typical of the world. He left his father's house. You can begin to see why Abraham said to the steward, "No! Isaac shall not leave this place! I am entrusting you with the responsibility to make sure that he stays in our land, because that's the one that God has given to us, and that's the one that Isaac has to live in."

But the prodigal son went to the far country, to the world. He wasted his substance, i.e., what was entrusted to him, in riotous living until what? He was eating that which was fed to the pigs. He had sunk to their level. The keeper of the pigs was now eating what was being fed to the pigs. The prodigal son lowered himself to their level by misusing what was entrusted to him. He was not a good steward.

Thomas Jefferson, one of the forefathers of American democracy, made this priceless little comment. He said, "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." That is also the price of guarding the treasure that God has given to us, and we have to make efforts to make sure that we protect what was given to us by doing things that are positive toward building it. If we are building it, then the protecting will take care of itself.

Luke 16:1-8 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. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of you? Give an account of your stewardship; for you may be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? For my lord takes away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owe you unto my lord? And he said, A hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take your bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owe you? And he said, A hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take your bill, and write fourscore. 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.

Now to this point in this parable, verse 8 is the one that is the key in terms of the instruction for you and me in being a good steward. I feel that this parable encapsulates much of what God is looking for in us in carrying out our responsibilities as a steward right now.

Sometimes there is a measure of perplexity in people because it appears in several places that Jesus was praising worldly-mindedness, and we will just say, "dishonesty." Well, He is not. What He is praising is the foresight and the wisdom and the shrewdness that the steward used in preparing for the future.

Notice in verse 8 He is saying in the context of this parable that many in the world have qualities that we, as children of God, as stewards of God, would do well to emulate in our pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. However, to use them to the wrong ends is wrong.

In this parable, the steward knew that judgment was falling upon him, and right now judgment is on the church, the household of God. Judgment is falling on you and me. The steward wisely prepared for the time that the axe would fall, when the judgment became final. And so the lord praised him for acting so wisely. Therein is the lesson, because when the judgment fell, the steward was prepared for it. Now it is beginning to become clear what the lesson is.

The question is, when judgment falls upon you and me, will we have used our time wisely enough that when the judgment becomes final our future is taken care of? In other words, how well we do now is going to have very powerful effect when the judgment falls. Is that not what Matthew 25 and the Parable of the Talents is also teaching us? Five talents. Two talents. What those two men did in the time that was allotted to them before the judgment was given earned them reward and ensured their future.

The word translated "world" in verse 8—"the children of this *world*"—is not the word that you and I are most familiar with. You and I are familiar with the word *cosmos*. That is the word that John used in I John 2, where everything in the world (*cosmos*) is passing away. This is the word *aion*. This word more properly means, or equates with, or is synonymous with the English word age, era, epic.

You and I have lived through the age of the Baby Boomers. We are now living in the age of the Generation X-ers, or we are living in the epic of the Generation X-ers, or we are living in the era of the Generation X-ers. This word *aion* indicates systems: the Baby Boomers system; the Generation X system; or societies or cultures that come and go, and therefore they are transient. They do not last. *Aions* come and *aions* go. We are getting close to what the lesson is here. "The children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light."

He is saying that regardless of when people live, that the people, let us say, who are successful during the Baby Boomer era, tend to be wiser than the weak of this world that God calls. They use their time, their energies, their brains, and everything else better than the people who are in the church.

We have to qualify this, though, because what I am saying to this point is not quite right. However, this is what our Lord and Master taught us, so there is wisdom in what He said here that He wants us to learn and understand. What is it about the people in the world that is better than what the people in the church do? That is what we have to emulate.

The people in the world use their time, their energies, their efforts in what is really nothing more than the absurdity of fixing their mind on a transient goal that is going to come, it will be here for awhile, and it will be gone. So Jesus is saying to you and me, "Why can't you, John Ritenbaugh, (supply your own name here) work as hard at being a success in reaching the Kingdom of God, taking care of your responsibilities, being a loyal, faithful steward? Why can't you work as hard at doing that as the world does at achieving a transient end that is going to be gone when they die?"

You know from things that you have read and have seen in the newspapers about those people who have become a success in the world, that most of them become a success because they paid the price. That is what Jesus is saying to the children of God who have been called to a stewardship that involves preparing for the Kingdom of God. The children in this world do all this work within these systems to achieve a glory that is passing away.

Jesus wants us to look ahead the way the unjust steward did, and to make provision for the future by using wisdom today in the conduct of our affairs. Jesus is reminding us that the very same good qualities that make the children of this world successful in this world will do well in making us good servants of God in preparation for the Kingdom of God. We make those efforts, and we do not have to worry about being a good steward. We *will* be.

Men spend endless time and pains devoting concentration, persistence, self-denial, and discipline in learning how to play an instrument, learning how to dance, learning how to golf, learning how to act, learning how to be a

lawyer, a doctor, a dentist, a journalist, a politician, a magician, or even a criminal. What Jesus sees here, and what the unjust steward was, is a pattern of a good example for His brothers and sisters to follow—not for the same end, but for a better end. A good end. An eternal end.

So what Jesus is applauding is the means for achieving the right end. That is the lesson of the Parable of the Unjust Steward. It is not hard. It is *hard to do*. What we have to do is look at our own life. Do we make anything like the effort to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ that you give in your own responsibilities out in the world to maintain your position in the world? Think about it. Which one do you work harder for?

Doing spiritual things does not come naturally, and we fight a difficult battle here. It is much easier for us to make effort to accomplish the physical than it does to accomplish the spiritual. But the same principles that bring success in the physical, if applied to the spiritual, will ensure that the steward will be prepared for the Kingdom of God. And when judgment comes down on him, he will be found with what? He will be found with character that will go through the grave. He will be ready.

Now let us look at verse 10.

Luke 16:10 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.

Are you seeing a parallel here?

Luke 16:11-12 If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, how will you commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, how shall he give you that which is your own?

Jesus shows us here that there are two kinds of valuable things. There is a lower, and there is a higher, and it is possible for one to be very rich in one and very poor in the other. You might recall the proverb that says, "There is one that makes himself rich, and yet has nothing, and there is one that makes himself poor, yet he has everything [or, 'he has great riches']."

Jesus is showing here in verses 10-12 a contrast. It is very helpful to understand this if you loose yourself from what it is very quick to conclude that mammon means, because mammon tends to mean "money" to us. No. It means more than that within the context of this parable. Mammon, within this parable, represents that which is another's.

Now get this. It represents *that which is another's*. It also represents that which is *the least*, and is therefore the lower of the two kinds of riches or valuable things. It is not merely money, but it represents everything that is material, external, temporal, and sensuous (physical) that the world can provide. So everything that is in the world is covered by this word *mammon*.

Mammon is the opposite, right within this parable here, of what Jesus called "*true riches*." He also called it "that which is your own." Now though it is not stated, the implication is that it is the spiritual things.

So let us make a little conclusion. Jesus is showing that there are two contrasting spheres of wealth: God on the one hand, and the world on the other. In effect, Jesus is saying that he who has God is **rich** regardless of how little of this world's riches, or mammon, that he might possess.

We have to think about this, because it is very easy for those of us in the church to feel put upon. It is very easy for us to feel oppressed, because we can look out on the world, and we see people who seem to be free—we see it there every day, we work within it every day. They seem to have all kinds of things that we cannot have because of our faith. They seem to have fine cars, fine clothing, boats, homes, go on cruises. Their Friday evenings and their Saturdays are not taken up by the Sabbath. Their incomes are not being tithed, because God's way constrains us to go in a certain direction.

I want you to think about the Israelites now. Did they not complain against God and against Moses in the wilderness, saying "Why don't we go back to Egypt?" ("Why don't we go back to the world?") Did it look to those people who were out in the wilderness as though they had left the good life to go out, and to go in a direction that was not as happy or as fulfilling as they originally thought it would be? That is a parallel with our life, see.

Jesus is trying to turn our thinking into a more correct direction, and that is brethren, that we have been entrusted with something that is so valuable there is no way that a price can even be put on it. And yet human nature drives us to feel sorry for ourselves and, like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, to feel we have been victimized by Herbert Armstrong, or God, and so they try to get rid of the leader. Human nature is really tricky, and we follow the same general pattern that God shows in that analogy—being released from Egypt.

One other point that Jesus is making here is that the riches that we have been entrusted with are valuable beyond our wildest estimation. We have knowledge of the true gospel. Our heritage is God and this earth and all of its wealth. We have the forgiveness of sin. We have access to God. We have His Holy Spirit. We understand His law. And every one of these things gives us the opportunity that the world does not have, because if we take care of them, we are going to be prepared to inherit *everything* with Abraham.

Do you understand that God began by telling Abraham, "You will inherit this piece of land"? Then the first thing you know, it was "You will inherit all the land of Canaan." Then Abraham was inheriting the earth. Then the next thing you know he was inheriting *everything* that God created through Jesus Christ! Where is the wealth? It is in us! Which one gets our time and attention? The externals in the world, or the truth that is in God and is in us?

Notice verses 26-27 of Hebrews 11, which talking about Moses.

Hebrews 11:26-27 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward [which is exactly what I am telling you to do now]. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

What we are called to do at this time is to fulfill our job as a steward entrusted with managing, protecting, preserving, attending, and increasing what has been entrusted to us. We are *fabulously* wealthy far beyond our wildest imagination. We cannot even begin to contain the wealth that God has and wants to share with us. We do not have the imagination even to think

it. We live in a nation in which mammon has been elevated to dizzying heights in people's minds, and most everybody is caught up in worshipping this false god, and that is very hard for us to resist because it is pushed at us so hard from every side.

It is wiser—it is better—to be wise and poor, than to be rich and foolish. Stewardship is a single word, a term which describes our relationship to everything that we have. Jesus is not saying that mammon is inherently evil or bad. It is simply a neutral, but God requires proper stewardship of us given to mammon, as well as that which is spiritual. He is teaching in this parable that one is more valuable than the other, because the one is true riches, and it is so much more valuable than the other there is no adequate comparison.

The warning for us here is to never allow our stewardship toward mammon that passes away to eclipse our stewardship toward God that is spiritual and eternal. What is important is what is at the very substance of your heart and mine. It is what you *are* , not what you have externally, that matters to God. Those external things are of this world. They are transient. They will not pass through the grave. But what is in your heart will, and that is what is to be concentrated on and built before we die.