

The unjust stewardLuke 16 vv.1-13.

Have you ever heard of a steward? Do you know what a steward is? Perhaps some of you do know, but there are probably others who are shrugging their shoulders. Well now just listen.

In this world are rich people and poor. This is not accidental, no, God has made them all. There are also people who are very rich. They possess many farms and a large number of fields. These people are, of course, unable to look after everything themselves, and neither is that necessary, for the farms are rented to different farmers. They plough the ground, sow and mow and harvest it, and look after the farm generally as though it was their own property.

Do they get the land and the farm for nothing then? No, each year they pay their rich landlord for its use. We call this: paying the rent!

The farm remains the property of the landlord, but they farm it or rent it.

Now it often happens that such a rich man appoints someone to receive on his behalf the rent from all the farmers. This man is known as a steward.

The steward makes sure that the farmers pay their rent on time. The steward ensures that if anything on the farm needs repair or renewal, that this is done. The steward then cares for and looks after all his lord's property. He looks after the income and the outgoings. The money which is left over he hands to his master.

We have such stewards in our country, but ~~they~~ there were also such people in days gone by among the Jewish nation.

The Lord now tells His disciples a parable which the Pharisees and publicans can also hear. Let us join them in our thoughts and listen also.

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"There was a certain rich man," the Lord begins. This man had many farms which were rented by him to various farmers. If he were to have looked after everything himself he would have been far too busy, so he appointed a steward to do it for him. He trusted the steward completely and thought that he was an honest man.

One day however, he hears that his steward is not an honest man. Certain men come and inform him that the steward is a deceiver and a thief.

The land owner is shocked to receive such information. He calls the steward to him at once and says, "How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship."

The steward should of course write everything in a book. How much money he had received; how much he had paid out and what ~~xx~~ he had spent it on. Everything should naturally have been in order.

But this steward's books were not in order. He had falsified them. He was a thief.

Fearful and trembling the dishonest servant returns to his home.

O, now it will all be known. He had acted ~~fix~~ falsely. He had deceived his master. He had thought: "My lord doesn't know." But now his master had to see the books and it could no longer be hidden.

When his deception became known, his master would thrust him out. He would never be allowed to be a steward again, and what then? ... What could he turn his hand to? ... How could he earn a living?

He could not do heavy manual work, for he had never been used to it. He would soon become exhausted. Must he beg then? ... No, that he was most unwilling to do. He was ashamed to do that. But what else could he do? ... He did not know.

Look, there he goes towards his home, pensive and brooding. From time to time he sighs deeply. He does not know what to do. His carefree life is finished. Poverty and hunger stand before his eyes, and all as a result of his lying and deception.

With a sigh he enters his home. Oh, here he will no longer be able to dwell, for very soon he will be thrust out as a deceiver.

He walks to and fro restlessly within his room. The sweat stands out on his brow. Oh, what can he do to save himself from this awkward situation?

All at once an idea comes into his head. Yes, yes, that's what he will do. Of course, it is the only chance of fending off the approaching calamity.

He calls the tenants to him. Not all of them at once, but one by one. He enquires whether they will just come to see him.

The first tenant enters soon after.

"How much owest thou unto my lord?", he asks of the farmer.

"Every year I have to give a hundred measures of oil," comes the answer.

In the land of Canaan the farmers did not pay with money, as we do nowadays, but with the fruit of their land. So that was what this tenant had to give.

The steward says to the farmer: "Tear up the paper on which it says that you must pay a hundred measures of oil. Here is a new paper, and write down that you must pay fifty measures every year."

But ... What does the steward do that? ... Well, the rent was really only fifty measures of oil, but he had secretly, without his lord's knowledge told the farmer that he must pay a hundred measures of oil.

And do you know what the steward had then been doing? ... Fifty measures of oil he had given to his master, but the other fifty measures he had kept for himself. How mean he had been, hadn't he. What a deceiver.

How, however that he was about to be dismissed, he quickly changed things. Why? ... Well, when a new steward comes, that farmer would always have to pay a hundred measures of oil. The new steward would say: "You have always given a hundred measures of oil, and you must continue to do so." But the new steward would have no idea that the rent had been doubled.

Now however the unjust steward quickly changes the rent back to the amount which his master had decreed. He rectifies the injustice.

And now he hopes that when he loses his job the farmer in gratitude will give him something to eat and drink. Then he will neither need to work or to beg and yet he will not perish with hunger.

So you see children, that is why the steward acts like that.

There goes the first tenant. He is happy. Wonder of wonders! From now on he need only pay half his rent. That is a windfall.

Soon after the second tenant comes along.

"How much rent do you pay each year?" he asks the farmer.

"A hundred measures of wheat," comes the answer.

"No," says the steward "Destroy that paper and write on a new one that you owe eighty measures each year."

Here is the same thing again, boys and girls. The true rent was eighty measures of wheat, but the unjust steward had secretly made it into a hundred measures. Eighty measures he gave to his lord, and twenty measures of wheat he kept for himself. With this ~~first~~ farmer too he brings back the rent to what it should have been.

As the second tenant leaves the steward thinks: "So, if I come to him later

for a measure of wheat, he will surely not refuse me. He will give it me in gratitude knowing that he would otherwise have been obliged always to pay a hundred measures.

The steward dealt in this way with all the tenants.

This comes to the ears of his master. How he gets to know this we are not told.

He smiles and says: "My steward has done wisely."

What? ... Does he approve of his steward's deceit? ... No indeed, but he does praise the unjust steward because he has made such careful preparation for his future.

This parable has something to say to us too. We know that we must die. We know that we must appear before God.

But it makes no impression on us. We go on in life just as though there were no God in heaven. We live in sin and do what is evil in God's eyes.

We are warned time after time, yet we dare to go on in life unconcerned. Is it not terrible? ... How do we dare to do so?

Each day that dawns can be our last, and if we die unconverted, then it is eternally too late. O, children think a little more about death and eternity. Kneel down and ask the Lord for grace. Now it can still be granted, tomorrow perhaps no more.

All the solemn warnings will come back to mind in eternity. Then it shall be said, "If only I had listened!", but then it is too late. How terrible to be lost for ever, in spite of so many warnings.

You may, rather you must ask the Lord continually for a renewed heart. The Lord is not bound to do anything for you, but how happy you would be if He should graciously hear and answer those petitions.

The Lord Jesus has paid for His people's sins. For you too there is still a hope of salvation.

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