

A GOOD AND WISE MANAGER

Luke 16:1-31

Key Verse: 16:9

"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

God gave man ability to make impossible tasks work out. We call it the ability of being a manager. God wants us to take care of his precious children and his world as good and wise managers. But no one can be a good and wise manager without having the fear of God. In this passage, we learn how to be a good and wise manager (1-18). There is another parable, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (19-31). In this passage, there are many spiritual allegories which make it difficult for us to understand. But they are easy to understand if we love Jesus from our hearts. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is a picture of the future destiny of those who live in the world seeking after physical pleasure. They will suffer agony of soul in the fiery lake of burning sulfur in hell forever.

First, selfish managers.

Jesus' disciples should possess several qualities. First, they must have a scholarly attitude, with a humble learning mind. Second, they must be good Bible teachers like Jesus. But without discipleship training, no one can be a good and wise manager. Discipleship training is very important, because if there are no disciples, there will be no future leaders. Third, they must also be good and wise managers. Even if they are good scholars and teachers, if they do not know how to manage the business well, they cannot build up the work of God.

Most likely, the disciples were pure, and they were men of heart. But they lacked management. Probably no one was concerned about room and board for Jesus and his company for tomorrow. Probably no one had a clear idea to be a help and to prosper Jesus' healing and preaching ministry. They were scatterbrains in management. They are useless as managers because they are selfish. Despite their poor attitude in management, Jesus tells his disciples

about a shrewd manager so they may be raised up as good and wise managers in doing the work of God.

Second, good and wise managers (1-7).

Good and wise managers must know how to make things work out. In verses 1-7 is a story about a shrewd manager. This man wasted his master's possessions, satisfying his selfishness. As a result, he was dismissed. He was in deep trouble. His spirit was not so good. He was too weak to dig, and he was too proud to beg. It was a time for him to become very fatalistic and sit down to complain to his wife. But he did not do so. Even if he was dismissed, he devised a plan of how to be a good manager. When he decided to be a good and wise manager, his mind was suddenly flooded with imagination and inspiration of how to manage the situation. He visited his master's debtors, one by one, and reduced their debts, some 50%, some 20%, some 10%, to some a word of comfort. In this way the manager helped the debtors to be able to pay their debts to his master. In this way, he increased his master's income incredibly. As a result, he was reinstated as the manager of the owner because of his shrewd management. When he used his heart to be a manager, he made up for his master's loss, and compensated for his own misconduct. Jesus commends this dishonest manager as a good and wise manager. The disciples needed to learn how to make things work out. In order to be good and wise managers, they should overcome their selfishness. They also must have the fear of God in their hearts.

Good managers must give their hearts to their task. The people of the world do their best to do the things of the world. They are admirable in their zeal, diligence and desire to fulfill their goals. They do their best. They take drastic measures if necessary to meet the needs in fulfilling their goals. There is a story about the son of a bean curd company president. This son of the president of a bean curd company, even though he was a U of C medical student, delivers the bean curds of his own accord on the weekends to fill all the orders of restaurants. His heart made him work hard and grow up to be a successful man, whatever he did. We see how researchers in every field of scholarship strive to see new results or to invent something new. During the last 30 years, communists' single goal has been to conquer the world with communism. For this, they live up to their principles. They also sacrifice them-

selves heroically for the purpose. Thus the U.S.S.R., which once had lost a war to Japan, became one of the world power nations. Though this nation has been divided, still, the Russian Federation has 10 time zones. Jesus knew his disciples were poor managers at the present. But he told them the parable of the shrewd manager in the hope that whatever they did, they would do from their hearts.

Look at verse 9. "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." The words, "worldly wealth," immediately make us think of money. But when Jesus said, "worldly wealth," he may well have meant a person's abilities, health, knowledge, wisdom, and so on. Biblically speaking, they are one's love, heart, soul and strength. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." In doing something or in serving God, we must give our love to it, and next, our heart and soul. Still, if it does not work, we must give all our strength. Then we can be good managers.

Jesus himself showed many good examples of how to be a good manager of God. Once he saw a blind beggar crying by the roadside. He looked born to be sorrowful. His eyes looked as if they were made to cry many tears, instead of seeing something. His fatalistic human condition caused Jesus' disciples to be very fatalistic about human life. However, at the moment Jesus had no way to help him, for he had no medical instruments on hand. But he had a way. He spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva and put it on the man's eyes. Jesus did this because his heart went out to him.

Jesus was very popular while ministering to the sick and needy. Thousands of people followed him. But Jesus gave up all the benefit which came from the support of the majority. And Jesus gave more of his attention to raising the twelve disciples for the future. Humanly speaking, he ran a losing business. But see how wise Jesus was--he raised the Twelve to be the future history makers and leaders of his church.

Good and wise managers must be faithful to their master. Look at verse 10. "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much." In

becoming a good manager the most essential quality is faithfulness. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." Look at verse 10. "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much." Those who do their best with small things can do their best with many things. Thus they become good and wise managers.

Good and wise managers must think that their master's possessions are their very own. Look at verse 13. "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." This verse indicates that Jesus was no longer speaking to his disciples, but to the Pharisees, so that they might be good stewards of God. This was Jesus' rebuking their love of money. What was their response? "The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus" (14). In this case, we should not be like the older brother in chapter 15. We must think, "God's is mine, and mine is God's." Fanny Crosby sang, "I am Thine, O Lord; I have heard Thy voice, And it told thy love to me."

Third, the destiny of hedonists (19-31).

This part is a story about a man who chose to live a hedonistic lifestyle and went to hell. Pleasure-seeking people are mostly very immoral and they corrupt themselves until they look like lepers. Romans 2:6-8 says, "God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.' To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."

Verses 19-21 give us a vivid picture of the anguish of those who had lived for pleasure. There was a rich man who lived in luxury every day. He was dressed in purple and fine linen. He enjoyed his pleasures by eating and drinking and chatting endlessly among rich people. Probably his companions were landlords and usurers and politicians. In contrast, Lazarus, covered with sores, would watch their delicious eating, swallowing his saliva. He longed to eat what fell from the rich man's table. But the dog would snatch it away from him. Probably Lazarus ate by the alms of passersby. But the rich man did not give

anything to him: rather, he enjoyed sadistic joy looking at Lazarus' misery, saying, "Oh, poor Lazarus!" And the dogs might have comforted Lazarus by licking his sores.

In the course of time, both Lazarus and the rich man died. The angels carried the beggar to Abraham's side and the rich man to hell. Strictly speaking, it was precisely his own choice to live a selfish and pleasure-seeking life. He knew what was the right choice. But he suppressed the truth of God and made the wrong choice. He had never expected that his choice would bring forth such a serious result. In hell, the rich man was in torment and looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. In his agony in hell's fire, he begged, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." The man had never given anything to Lazarus, but he wanted Lazarus to run an errand for him to get some water to quench his thirst. What did Abraham say to him? Look at verse 25. "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.'" Abraham reminded him of how he had lived a selfish and pleasure-seeking life, suppressing the truth of God intentionally. Despite his prick of conscience, he had never tried to please God or be a blessing to others. The reality is that he was now in hell, and there is a great chasm between the kingdom of God and hell. (26) The rich man thought his brothers should not come where he was. So he said to Abraham, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." Abraham assured him that if they did not listen to the prophets they would not listen to Lazarus either. What did the man do next? In his burning pain and agony of soul he begged again: "No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." He regretted that he had not repented even though he knew he should have repented. Now he was too late. He wished that somehow his brothers might not come where he was through repentance and by listening to the word of God.

But Abraham told him that it wouldn't work that way (31). In this verse Abraham tells us that a person can truly repent while on earth. There is a story

about a woman who rose from the dead one day after she died. She told all her townspeople that she had been to hell and heaven, and that hell is a terrible place, and that heaven is paradise. Then all the townspeople decided to attend church. But after one month, most of them dropped out of church. Finally, the woman also completely forgot about going to church. Faith is faith in God. Faith is not in miracles. God is so gracious that he gives us many opportunities in which we may come back to our senses and next, come back to God. Ecclesiastes says that to a human being there is "a time to be born," "a time to weep," and "a time to laugh" (Ecc 3:1-8). We should not be fixed in our own idea, or be deceived that we would live forever in the world. It is the time when we must have the fear of God and be his good and wise managers.

May God help us not to choose a hedonistic lifestyle so that we may not go to hell. May God help us use all our hearts and spirits to give much benefit to God's work. How beautiful it is to be a good and wise manager of God instead of being Mr. Little Do Nothing.