



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Luke

Chapter 16

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Introduction

- In the previous chapter the Lord Jesus showed clearly through the three parables, God's greatest love
- But this awesome love has to be met with love and wisdom
- He created man and gave him a perfect free will of his own
- And the man could accept this fellowship or reject it
- Now, the Lord offers us two parables that urge us to accept His friendship by our own free will
- These are the parables of the dishonest manager, and the parable of Lazarus and the rich man where we see two teachings deal with the use/abuse of money/wealth, 16:1-13 and 16:19-31



Introduction

- The two parables are separated by a condemnation of the Pharisees for their love of money and two other teachings about the Law
- The focus of final teaching about wealth is the inevitable judgment of the rich for their lack of compassion for the poor

Chapter Outline

- The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13
- The Law, the Prophets, and the Kingdom 16:14-18
- The Rich Man and Lazarus 16:19-31

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- Jesus showed us in the previous parables the divine fatherly love towards sinners
- So now He wants us to see that it is the duty of sinners, in their repentance and their return to their Father's house to be well equipped with wisdom
- The parable of the 'Prodigal Son' showed clearly the sinner's return to his father's house, in great repentance and regret
- In this chapter he speaks to us of charity and the love of giving, as faithful steward appointed in charge by God Himself

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- Thus we make friends from what He granted us
- There is the rich man, clearly a noble of high rank, whose residence probably is at a distance from his estates
- Over these he has placed, as administrator, the one called here a steward
- This steward has wasted the revenues of the lands
- He appears to have been generally a careless if not a dishonest servant
- The owner of the estates, when he becomes aware of the facts of the case, at once gives notice of dismissal to the steward, desiring him before resigning to give in his accounts

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- The Unjust Steward represents primarily the Pharisees and scribes in their teaching and ministerial functions
- But though spoken in the hearing of the Pharisees, the parable was addressed, not to them, but *to the disciples*
- And the reason of this is obvious
- They, too, were called to be “stewards;” they, too, collectively and individually, would have to give an account of their stewardship
- But if this is what the steward represents, then the rich man can be none else than God, who both appoints the stewards and calls them to account

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- In the further extension of the parable it is, of course, applicable to all who have any “goods” entrusted to them
- We all will give account of our stewardship regarding our time, our talents, our substance, and our gifts
- *Give an account of your stewardship*, These are words that everyone will hear, both sinners and believers
- All will have to give *account* in some way, and we will give account to God

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- When the steward knew that he would be called to account, he knew his poor management would be exposed
- He is admitting and cannot deny his guilt, for he sees his dismissal as the certain result of the rendering of the account demanded of him
- This day of his dismissal must be prepared for; very carefully, very anxiously
- He knew that other options were unsuitable to him, *I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg*
- He was too weak to dig, too proud to beg, he thought of a feasible plan at last, *I have resolved what to do*

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- The steward, knowing he would be called to account, used his present position to prepare him for the next stage of his life
- He sees the *debtors* one by one, not all together
- These debtors might be farmers, who paid their rents in kind, or persons who had got supplies of goods from the master's stores
- So, the steward made friends with his master's debtors by settling their accounts for less than they actually owed
- The steward by thus tempting the debtors with an immediate gain, and making them sharers in his frauds, took the readiest and most direct means of securing at once their favor and their silence

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- Likewise the conduct of the Pharisees
- Thus by their Corban teaching, Matthew 15:5 they released men from the obligation of supporting parents, and made lying under oath easy by their artificial distinctions as to oaths, Matthew 5:33, 23:16-22
- They gave a wide approval to lust by their doctrine of divorce, Matthew 5:31, 19:3, and substituted the paying tithes of mint, and anise, and cumin for the weightier matters of the Law, Matthew 23:23
- The *master*, the rich man of the parable, he too, in the outer framework of the story, is one of the children of this world, and he admires the sharpness and quickness of the steward's action

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- There are many interpretations of this parable
- However, we ought to look to the figurative meaning of the whole parable and not for the individual parts
- In Jesus' story the steward was a freeman who earned his living by the additional revenue he could add to the bill of the money owed his master
- He probably was not cheating his master by dropping the sum that each of the creditors owed; but probably he was simply reducing his commission, in some cases probably eliminating his cut completely

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- At this point in his life, he realized that his master's creditors' gratitude and friendship was more valuable to him than money
- Jesus added the thought that the *sons of this world* were more wise, bold, and forward-thinking in the management of what they had
- *more shrewd*, than the people of God, *the sons of light*
- Some consider this to be one of Jesus' most difficult parables, because it seems that Jesus used an obviously dishonest man as an example for His disciples

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- Jesus does not praise the steward's action; but He does draw our attention to the good deeds the steward does in order to win friends who will help him in his hour of need
- The dishonest steward was a good example on several points
- First, he 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 properly about our Master's business
- Second, he took advantage of his present position to arrange a comfortable future

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- Jesus' assessment is still true, *the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light*
- If we pursued the Kingdom of God with the same passion and zeal that the children of this world pursue profits and pleasure, we would live in an entirely different world
- St. Augustine comments on this by saying, "From another point, this parable was said so we realize that if this manager who acted deceitfully, has been able to achieve praise; so how much more will it be with those that please God in carrying out His commandments in their actions."

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- St. Cyril the great confirms in his comment on this parable as well as in many other places, that the Lord Jesus when He presents a parable, He does not mean for us to apply it from all aspects, but rather from the aspect that God wanted and meant
- Likewise, it is not appropriate for us to follow the example of this manager in his carelessness of the property money not in his cheating of the documents; we rather have to follow his example in keeping our wisdom and our vision of eternity

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- With his usual solemn formula, *I say unto you*, in contrast with what had gone before
- The Lord gave out His moral interpretation of the parable; reminding us that we need to use our present resources to plan ahead for eternity
- *unrighteous mammon*, Is the wealth to which that character for the most part attaches, wealth wrongly gained and wrongly spent
- Riches promise much, and perform nothing: they stir hope and confidence, and deceive both
- Riches, in making a man depend on them for happiness, they rob him of the salvation of God and of eternal glory

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- For these reasons, they are represented as unjust and deceitful
- And yet “of that mammon” men are to make friends
- *when you fail*, So that when you shall be dismissed from being stewards of God's possessions, that is, when you die
- The right use of wealth in helping the poor, making men happier and better, leading them to repentance and to God, will gain for us friends, perhaps the very persons whom we have helped, perhaps the angels of God who rejoice over one sinner that repents, perhaps even Christ and the Father, who will receive us *into an everlasting home*

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- *they may receive you*, Some say that *they* refers to the holy Trinity, or the angels, may receive *you* into heaven
- St. John Chrysostom says, if you serve the saints, that is, the poor, then you will share them their reward
- And St. Ambrose comments on *they*, saying “By giving to the poor, we obtain the pleasure of the angels and all the other saints.”
- In these words in vs 10 of Jesus, money is considered to be one of the *least* things

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- The most which we can have in this world is *least* compared to the smallest gift of heaven
- We have here the broad rule, upon which God will decide the soul's future, laid down
- If the man has been faithful in his administration of the comparatively unimportant goods of earth, it is clear that he can be entrusted with the far more important things which belong to the world to come
- To be faithful in that *least* is to acknowledge that we have it as stewards, not as possessors, and shall have to give an account of our stewardship

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- The conduct of that steward, regarded in one point of view, was held to be wise, and we, though in a very different way, were advised to imitate it; yet here we are distinctly told that it is fidelity, not unfaithfulness, which will be eventually re-warded - the just, not the unjust steward
- If you make that use of your riches which I have been recommending, you shall be received into those *everlasting home*, where all the friends of goodness dwell, because, by your fidelity in managing the smallest trust of temporal things committed to your care, you show that you are capable of the much greater trust of spiritual and heavenly things and enjoyments, things of a much higher nature

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- Earthly blessings including wealth/riches are from God
- From those blessings we are required to care for the poor and disadvantaged
- If we cannot be trusted in the matters of sharing our earthly wealth, Jesus asks the question, why should God trust us with the wealth/riches of eternal life?
- God has the power to judge the souls of human beings and the power to determine their eternal destiny
- Here, Jesus seems to refer to the fact that all our riches belong to God, and we must see that we are managing *His* resources

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- Faithfulness in this will result in blessing that is our own, *who will give you what is your own*
- *who will give you what is your own?*, We have here a very magnificent promise
- Although on earth man can possess nothing of his own - here he is but a steward for a time of property belonging to another - yet a prospect is held out to him that, if he be found faithful in the trust while on earth, in the world to come something will be given to him really and truly his own
- There will be no dismissal or death there

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- Verse 13 is the summary of Jesus' teaching on this subject Jesus states that serving two masters is a simple impossibility
- If you think that you are successfully serving two masters, you are deceived
- One can *have* both money and God; but one cannot *serve* both money and God
- Some think that just because they are not rich, they are not a slave to money
- But you don't have to be rich to serve *mammon*; the poor have just as much potential for greed as the rich have

The Parable of the Unjust Steward 16:1-13



- You cannot be disorderly attracted to material wealth and also be a servant of God
- The two callings oppose each other
- You are either God's servant or a slave to riches
- The love of money will turn money/wealth into a false god
- To be dependent on riches is opposed to the teachings of Jesus who asks for complete dependence on God as the chief characteristic of Christian discipleship

The Law, the Prophets, and the Kingdom 16:14-18



- The words are showing that the Pharisees had been listening during the previous parable, and that the words, though addressed to the disciples, had been meant also for them
- *derided*, The verb implies visible rather than audible signs of despise
- A word that forcibly expresses the appearance of contempt
- The derision of the Pharisees was based on their own self-interest; they *were lovers of money*
- Often, we reject the message of Jesus because it hits too close to home

The Law, the Prophets, and the Kingdom 16:14-18



- They rejected and despised what He said about their injustice, in their stewardship; the calling of them to an account for it, and concerning the true use of worldly riches, and the contempt of them
- They looked upon themselves safe and secure in the good opinion of the people, and happy in the enjoyment of worldly things; and looked upon Him as a weak man, to talk in the manner he did
- God knows that they are alive to the world, and dead to God and goodness; therefore, *For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God*
- For some people the idea *God knows your hearts* is *comfort*; for others it is a woe

The Law, the Prophets, and the Kingdom 16:14-18



- Jesus indicated that the ministry of John the Baptist marked the end of one great aspect of God's work
- *Since that time* (the time ending with John ministry) the good news of a new covenant is presented, with an order that is different than the law yet it fulfills the law
- With John, Jesus says, what was promised by Moses and the prophets is coming to fulfillment
- The Lord did not say the Mosaic law has ceased, but that it has become a beginning to the gospel preaching

The Law, the Prophets, and the Kingdom 16:14-18



- It is as if what is the least, stops with the advent of what is better
- Therefore let us take by force the kingdom of God
- We ought to be dedicated, willing to sacrifice and risk all for the sake of the Kingdom, and have passion to see the Messiah reign; in a sense, we are also at war
- St. Ambrose comments on *everyone is pressing into it* by saying, "For taking by violence in the faith is righteousness, and being cold is a sin."
- St. John Chrysostom also says, "He is preparing them to have faith in Him, because when the time of John has come, all matters have been fulfilled. I am He who has come."

The Law, the Prophets, and the Kingdom 16:14-18



- *for one tittle of the law to fail*, This is said by Jesus Christ, lest it should be thought by His saying, that the law and the prophets were until John, that they were no longer, nor of any more use; but were now abolished and laid aside
- The new order that we must *press into* is not an order of rebellion; it is a new order of submission and obedience to God; His new order fulfills the law
- For example, the law concerning marriage is still binding – no matter how some Rabbis tried to explain it away

The Law, the Prophets, and the Kingdom 16:14-18



- This verse illustrates, no less than the others, the spirit of the Pharisees
- They professed to reverence the Law and the Prophets, yet, the doctrine and discipline of divorce which they taught, lowering the sacredness of the life of home, and ministering to the growing permissiveness of men's morals, was precisely what was meant by the steward's bidding the debtors take their bill 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.'*

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- Some could not make the connection between this parable and what was said before
- But the *deride* in verse 14 explains the sequence of thought
- On one side, among those who listened to our Lord, were the Pharisees, living in the love of money and of the enjoyments which money purchased
- On the other, were the disciples, who had left all to follow their Master, poor with the poverty of beggars
- The Pharisees had mocked at the counsel that they should make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, who should receive them into everlasting habitations

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- They are now taught, and the disciples are taught also, what was the outcome of such a life when it passed
- Some fathers think this parable is a real and actual story
- St. Ambrose of Milan proves this by the poor man's name 'Lazarus' as being mentioned
- But some others think, this name is only a symbolical one, because the word 'Lazarus' means 'One who was assisted' or the Help of God
- He also says, "But not all poverty is holy, or all riches criminal, but as luxury disgraces riches, so does holiness commend poverty."

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- *There was a certain rich man*, He is left nameless, perhaps to imply that *his* name was not “written in heaven” Luke 10:20
- *clothed in purple and fine linen*, The two words express extreme luxury
- Purple cloth was the most expensive textiles available in the ancient world
- The true sea purple, was most precious and rare dye
- Only the wealthiest individuals could afford cloth dyed purple, which is why it was the color of the garments of kings and rulers
- *fared sumptuously every day*, With this princely rich man banquets were a matter of daily occurrence

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- Not far from the rich man – at *his gate* was a desperately poor and sick man
- In a remarkable contrast to the life of the rich man, the Master, with a few touches, portrays the life of the beggar Lazarus
- Perhaps the poor man was at a distance from the rich man that the rich man might have been moved to compassion, and Lazarus at the same time might see his table
- Lazarus was a constant sufferer, covered with sores and incurable disease
- St. Cyril of Alexandria describe the rich man, “The rich man was crueller than the dogs, because he felt no sympathy or compassion for him but was completely unmerciful.”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- St. John Chrysostom comments on *who was laid at his gate* and say, “that the rich might not say, I never saw him, no one told me; for he saw him both going out and returning.”
- Even though the rich man saw the poor man stricken with extreme hunger, bitter physical weakness, sore wounds, deprivation, sickness due to this condition, yet he did not think of him
- This poor one, who was extremely needy and oppressed with many sufferings- the rich did not give him even the crumbs that fell from his table, even though Lazarus was very eager to have just some of it

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- The end comes to the two men
- Lazarus did not even have the honor of a burial in this life, yet heaven honored him, being *carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom*
- The rich man had the honor of a burial, but no angelic companion or pleasant destination
- Ironically when both men died, their conditions were reversed which Jesus uses to serve as a warning to the Pharisees and others in the crowd who despise and neglect the poor and afflicted while loving money

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- St. Augustine comments on *Abraham's bosom* by saying, "you must understand Abraham's bosom to be a retired and hidden resting-place where Abraham is; and therefore, called Abraham's, not that it is his alone, but because he is the father of many nations, and placed first, that others might imitate his preeminence of faith."
- The rich man's place was full of torment and pain, while Lazarus enjoyed the comfort and care of Abraham
- *Hades* is something of a waiting place until the day of final judgment, Revelation 20:11-13
- *he lifted up his eyes*, Lazarus has now come to be at the top, and he at the bottom

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- *dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue*, “Indeed, he was in need of cooling his tongue when it was absolutely burning hot
- His tongue that once spoke in great arrogance, now he wishes to cool it, because wherever there is sin, there is punishment
- His tongue transgressed more and so his agony is more
- He wished to cool his tongue whereas his whole body was in the flames
- This expresses what was written, Proverbs 18: 21 “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue*”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- Even in hell, a condemned spirit must hate the evil by which he is tormented, and desire that good that would free him from his torment
- If a lost soul could be reconciled to its torment, and to its situation, then, of course, its punishment must cease to be such
- An eternal desire to escape from evil, and an eternal desire to be united with the supreme good, the fulfilment of which is for ever impossible
- *'Father Abraham, have mercy on me,* The rich man was definitely a descendant of Abraham, and the great father of faith did not disown him

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- Yet having Abraham as father was not enough to escape his torment in the life to come
- Now the rich man was the beggar, pleading with Abraham
- Abraham here simply bids the tortured man to call to his memory the circumstances of the life he had lived on earth, telling him that in these circumstances he would find the reason for his present woeful state
- The rich man was not in torment because he was rich; but because he lived a life apart from love and trust in God, and this was demonstrated by his life

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- Through his earthly life the rich man enjoyed all the good things of life; yet did not share them or use them to prepare for the life to come
- Though the rich man could see and speak with Abraham, he wasn't close to him at all
- There was a *great gulf fixed* between them, and their destinies were fixed for all time
- Abraham's reply to this anticipated objection is basically: "we might not deny you this small consolation if it were in our power to bring it to you, but unfortunately that is impossible
- The time is over and past, and that there is no opportunity for any repentance

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- It is again emphasized that now the rich man is the beggar, not Lazarus
- It is again seen that the rich man still thought of Lazarus as a servant to him
- He asked Abraham to send Lazarus on another assignment, this time for the benefit of his *five brothers*
- On first thoughts, the rich man's request to Abraham appears prompted alone by his anxiety for the future of his brothers who were still alive
- But perhaps he was trying to justify his own sad past

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- If someone from the dead had come to him to inform him about eternity, he would have lived a godly life and he would have repented and did not come to this place of *torment*
- Abraham pointed out that the rich man's brothers had all the necessary information to escape the torment of Hades
- Listening to *Moses and the prophets* and doing what they said to do was enough
- Some asked the question of why *five* are named
- Some say it is a symbol of the five senses, in the indulgence of which the man had passed his life

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- Or to the five books of Moses
- It may have been merely the use of a certain number, as in the case of the five wise and the five foolish virgins, Matthew 25:2, or the five talents, Matthew 25:15, or the five cities in the land of Egypt, Isaiah 19:18
- The rich man knew what his brothers must do, and what he *did not* do: *repent*
- He mistakenly hoped that a special appearance of one from the dead would persuade them; but Abraham knew it would not

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- After all, the unbeliever thinks the Bible *already* speaks too much of judgment and hell; they don't want to hear more of it, even if the messenger came from the world beyond
- The irony is that Jesus fulfills the prophecies of Moses and the prophets; He will arise from the dead and yet many will still refuse to believe
- Additionally, Lazarus also came back from the dead, John 11:38-44 and the religious leaders did not believe Him; they tried to kill Him, John 12:9-10
- With this story Jesus showed the weakness of trusting in signs to bring people to faith

The Rich Man and Lazarus

16:19-31



- The reply of Abraham was especially addressed to those Jews who were standing round him and even asking for a sign
- They had all read and heard again and again the Books of Moses and the records of the prophets
- If these guides had failed to show them the right way, a special messenger sent to them would be quite useless
- The rich man wasn't lost because he was rich
- He was lost because he did not listen to the law and the prophets
- Many will also be lost for the same reason



Discussion

- Read the parable in Luke 16:1-7, thinking about the behavior of the steward. How would you summarize his work behavior? Contrast his behavior with the behavior of believers in Colossians 3:22-25. What are some of the things that the unrighteous steward did wrong in his work? What are some ways that people today do the same things in their work?
- How would you evaluate the actions of the master? What would you have done differently? Why did the master commend the steward? Was Jesus suggesting that the steward's behavior was proper? What was Jesus pointing out about the steward?



Discussion

- What principle does Jesus remind his hearers of, 16:10-12? How does this show that Jesus was not commending the behavior of the steward?
- What do you see as your obligations concerning your material blessings.
- Why was it that the Pharisees ridiculed Jesus' words in v. 1-13? What did they think loving God meant (Matt 6:25;)? Why were they able to rationalize their love of money? According to v. 13, were they really lovers of God



Discussion

- How is this parable in 16:19-26 linked with Luke 16:1-15?
- In what manner, would you say the rich man lived? Where did Lazarus live in relation to the rich man? Do you think that the rich man knew who Lazarus was? What does this show about his character?
- Once the rich man realizes that nothing can be done for him, who does he think of first? What is his motivation for sending someone to his brothers? Is that a good motivation? What is our motivation to be in sharing the gospel (Romans 15:15-16; 1 Corinthians 9:22-23)?