

## Give An Account Of Your Stewardship.

Text: Luke 16:1-9

Suggested Hymns:

371, 300, 377, 372, 239

1) Are you a wise steward?

2) Are You A Generous Steward?

3) Are You A Faithful Steward?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 16:1-9, <sup>1</sup> *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. <sup>2</sup> 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.'*

<sup>3</sup> *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. <sup>4</sup> I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'*

<sup>5</sup> *"So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' <sup>6</sup> And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'* <sup>7</sup> *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.'*

<sup>8</sup> *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. <sup>9</sup> "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Lord took His parables from various scenes of human life. The farmer sowing his seed, the shepherd leading his flock, the woman

looking for the lost coin, the merchant selling everything to buy the one precious pearl, the fisherman catching all manner of fish, but throwing back into the sea those that are no good. These are all subjects for His parables.

Sometimes His parables are like the gold ore; the miner rarely finds pure gold, but it is mixed with stone of no value, and he must separate the gold from the dross.

This parable of the unjust steward is of that nature. The Lord does not recommend him as an example in every particular. He is a mixture of some bad and a few good things, and the Lord wants us to test all things and to hold fast to that which is good.

At first glance it seems a parable of very limited application; after all, few of us are business managers of rich merchants. But on closer examination the parable presents a truth that is applicable to us all.

We are the Lord's stewards? All that we have is His; for Him we must use it as long as we have it; to Him we must return it when He demands it; and to Him we must give an account of our stewardship when He calls for it.

We are the Lord's stewards. If we would always bear this in mind, whoever we may be, however much or little we may have, whether they be temporal or spiritual gifts, what a change that would often make in our life and in our attitudes!

We are the Lord's stewards. Do we believe this? Then let us note a word of this Gospel, a word which someday, will sound loudly in our ears: *Give Account of Your Stewardship.*

The text suggests three questions which we shall be required to answer in that final accounting. Let us answer them one by one: 1) Are You a Wise Steward? 2) Are You a Generous Steward? And 3) Are You a Faithful Steward? May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Are You A Wise Steward?**

An outstanding characteristic of this steward, one which the lord directly commends, is his wisdom. He thought of the future and prepared for it. True, it would have been better had he thought of it always and been faithful in his office.

Then the call to give an account of his stewardship would have had no terrors for him.

But the point is that when the call came and he had to admit, “*my master is taking the stewardship away from me,*” he thought of his future and used all his faculties to provide for it.

### **Thinking of the Future**

Are we wise stewards? Do we think of our future? Do we think of it in time, and do we ask, *What shall I do so that when the time of accounting comes, I may not fail?* In earthly things men are very wise. They make plans for the future; they think and figure and calculate to assure some gain, to prevent some loss, to be sure of a future of peace and happiness. That is commendable wisdom.

But how many provide for eternity? We do not hesitate to call a man a fool who lives only for the day, but never thinks of tomorrow. What would you call a person who lives day after day, year after year, and never thinks of the time beyond the grave?

A man who spends money all the year around and never sits down to figure out how income and expenses balance out is called a poor manager; what of the man who spends all his lifetime, his talents, his goods, and never thinks, *Can I account for it?*

The end will come, as we all know. “*2 So he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you?’*” What if God would call us to account today? What is it that I hear of you, to whom I have entrusted so much? How is it that you abuse the body, which is the temple of the Spirit, in the service of sin? The mind, which makes man the crown of all creation, to despise the Creator and His will and to harm fellow creatures?

How is it that in selfishness and pride you waste the goods which I have entrusted to you? How is it that the children I have given you to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord grow up as though they had no immortal soul?

How is it that you waste the long time of grace, forty, fifty, sixty years, and the thoughts under your grey hair are as flighty and careless as they ever were

under the dark? “*What is this I hear about you? ... you can no longer be steward.*”

Sooner or later the verdict will come to every one of us: “*You can no longer be steward.*” And from this verdict there is no appeal. The carpenter must leave his work bench, the banker his records, and the farmer his plough. You fathers and mothers will be separated from your children, and from each other, for your time is up. Then what will you do?

### **Preparing for the Future**

We read in Psalm 90:12, <sup>12</sup> *So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.* This steward is frightened. He does not try to deny his guilt or to minimise the seriousness of his condition, or to persuade himself that something will happen to save him.

Nor does he despair and make an end of it like Judas. The thought that is uppermost in his mind when he goes to bed, when he lies sleepless on his couch, when he rises again, is: *What shall I do during the short time that is left?*

And comparing all ways of escape, he arrives at a conclusion and makes his plans: <sup>4</sup> *I have resolved what to do.* It is a wicked plan, but it is an effective plan. He is wise; he makes use of the moment to prepare for the future.

The past is gone; the future is uncertain; but the present is mine, O soul. It would be foolish to deny our guilt or try to forget. It is foolish to argue: “*Sin is not so bad; God’s threats are not meant so seriously.*” It is foolish to live on in carelessness and enjoy life as long as it lasts. It is utterly foolish to despair and rush headlong into eternity and endless ruin.

There is a way out, not a vain attempt at self-help. God has prepared a way of salvation, that of repentance and faith. Long years are past, but still the Gardener is tending the tree. Your mind is bright, you can think, you can learn, you can pray. Use it before you lie on your deathbed, weak and in pain and unable to use your faculties.

How long have you had the means of grace? You have not used them as diligently as you should; but still the doors of church and school are open and, with them, the doors of heaven.

And, yes, be even wiser than this steward; do not say, “***I cannot dig.***” Dig deeply into the saving Gospel, and dig deeply into your heart and plant the seed of this saving truth that it may bear fruit unto righteousness. And do not be ashamed to beg, to pray to God who gives both to will and to do; pray that He forgive your sin and strengthen your weakness and prepare you for the day of accounting.

Are we wise stewards? Do we say, “*I have lost much time, but I am now resolved what I will do. I will make use of the present to save my soul — today — for tomorrow may be too late.*”

## 2. Are You A Generous Steward?

“***Give an account of your stewardship.***” There is a second reminder in this. Are you a generous steward?

### The Generosity Of The Unjust Steward

Again we may learn from the steward in our text. He used his official position to benefit others; he closed his career with a favour to his fellow workers. He remitted a part of their debt to the debtors of his master. To be sure, he had no right to do that; he did it at the expense of his master; his purpose was selfish, purely and simply selfish: to gain their good will so that they would take him into their homes when he lost his own home.

All this is not for our imitation. To be generous with stolen goods, that is not pleasing to the Lord; nor would anyone imagine it to be when it is put so bluntly. And yet, camouflaged, how many “respectable” people follow the unjust steward in this respect.

When a candidate for office curries favour with the voters by promising them the blue sky, telling them that under his management they will have only rights, no duties — that is an unjust steward.

When a preacher tries to win hearts by painting an easy way to heaven instead of the Lord’s own description, “***Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way;***”<sup>1</sup> when he says: ‘*Your debt to the Lord is not so great as certain people tell you; God isn’t so particular about faith — just cross out fifty of those hundred measures of oil; God isn’t so strict in judging your life; He doesn’t demand a*

*great amount of the fruits of righteousness — just cross twenty of those measures of wheat and take it easy’ — that is an unjust steward of the mysteries of God.*

Or take a man who during a long lifetime has amassed a few millions of stolen goods and, before he dies, tries to smother his conscience by giving a few thousands to charity, isn't he the very counterpart of this unjust steward? To be generous with stolen goods, - that is not set forth for our imitation.

But now that we have put away the dross, isn't there a nugget of gold in this part of the Gospel, too? The Lord points it out, ***“make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.”*** There is both a duty and a blessing in generous love.

### **Duty of Generous Love**

***“Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon.”*** Christ calls earthly riches ***“unrighteous mammon”*** because they are so often ill-gotten and still oftener ill-spent.

But even though there is not a dishonest cent in our possession, do we feel quite at ease when we who have possessions face the poverty and hunger and misery of others? Jesus tells us what to do as the stewards of God: ***“Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon.”***

Perhaps your money has only made enemies for you: people who envy you; thieves who try to get what you have; slanderers who rob you of the joy of possession; debtors who hate you when they pay their interest.

But you may gain friends with what you have. And, after all, it is not your own; you are but the Lord's steward; it is His whatever you have, whether it be ten or five or two talents. And He does not want us to harden our hearts against our needy brethren.

Let us follow our Lord's example; from the angel before the throne to the worm in the dust, the Lord remembers them all; and we, His children, should serve one another with the blessings He has given us.

### **Generous Love Is Generously Blessed**

But, above all, the Lord wants us to consider the blessings of such generous love. ***“That when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.”*** ***“When you fail”*** — why, even here and in the midst of happiness it is sweet to

know that I have dried a tear, or healed a wound; in this house they receive me with joy; they pray for me.

But — “***When you fail.***” Are we sure that the day will never come, when we need the help which we now extend to others? “***When you fail***” — the day will come when all of us fail and none of our earthly goods will help us.

When we leave this world — naked as on the day we entered it; when our soul, without riches, without merits, stands at the gate of eternity, there will be only one thing of which even death cannot rob us: these works, of which the Lord says: *They do follow us;*<sup>2</sup> *works done in the love of God and our fellow men.*

These works will not open heaven’s doors to us. Luther said: “*I would not give a penny for St. Peter’s merits that he should help me; he cannot help himself; for what he has, he has of God through faith in Christ.*” Heaven is God’s free gift through faith in the merits of Christ.

But our letter of recommendation to the Great Judge will read: “***Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.***”<sup>3</sup> The prayers and the blessings of those whose friendship we have gained with our mammon will knock at the doors of the everlasting habitations and bear testimony to our faith which was active in love. And when the call comes, ***Give account of your stewardship***, they will be there, the living proof that we have been generous stewards.

### **3. Are You A Faithful Steward?**

And now the final question: ***Give an account of your stewardship***; are you a faithful steward? Last but not least — in fact, it is the most important requirement — wisdom for yourself, love for your brethren, but, above all, faithfulness to your Lord.

#### **The Steward Is Flagrantly Unfaithful**

This steward was wise, he provided for his future. To some extent he served his fellow men, although his motive was mean and selfish. But in his relation to his master he was an unmitigated scoundrel. He was unfaithful, a wicked and absolutely unjust steward, a horrible example.

St. Paul, that faithful steward of God's mysteries, says: ***“It is required in stewards that a one be found faithful.”***<sup>4</sup> And after relating this parable the Lord Himself tells His disciples in Luke 16:10–12, <sup>10</sup> ***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.***

<sup>11</sup> ***Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?*** <sup>12</sup> ***And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?***

### **Motives for Faithfulness**

Faithfulness is to have an eye only for the Lord, in whose service we stand and to whom we owe an account for our stewardship. In all that we do, do not ask, *What do I get out of it?* but, *What does the Lord think of it?*

Such faithfulness does not grow in our natural heart, but only in a heart which has come to know the great love the Lord has manifested toward us. How generous He has been to us!

God not only provides us with all that we need to support this body and life, and much more; not only the most precious gifts of body and talents of the mind, which He has given us; but also all that we need to ensure to us that blessed eternal life, after all this world offers has been taken from us:

He has given us His own Son, in whom we have redemption from our sin in His blood; His Holy Spirit, who has given us the knowledge of, and implanted in our heart the trust in, the redemptive work of Christ.

A heart which has learned to know and rightly to value this great love of God will most joyfully comply with His request written in Proverbs 23:26, <sup>26</sup> ***My son, give me your heart.*** And then the rest will follow as a natural result.

### **Praise for the Faithful Steward**

A wise and generous and faithful steward looks forward to the account he has to render his Lord without fear; he knows he will not fail in the judgement. Even more than that; his Lord will reward him. The Lord knows His own. Those who have been faithful in the little things of this life will be entrusted with the heavenly riches.

But to the unfaithful steward the Lord will say, *‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.’* From this preserve us, dear heavenly Father!

The person who is faithful in little things, the duties of this life, with his eyes upon the Lord, walking the way outlined for him, although it be but the way of a servant, he will have the praise of the Lord: *‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’*<sup>5</sup> This grant us, dear Father in heaven. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:13

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 14:13

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 25:40

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:2

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25:21