

JESUS' CROOK¹
By Pastor Paul Penno Jr.
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Which has greater value a diamond or a grain of corn? Put both of them away, and at the end of a hundred years the grain of corn will still have no money value, while the diamond's value, running up into the hundreds of dollars, will be undiminished. At the end of a thousand years the same thing will be true. But suppose, instead, we bury the grain in the warm, moist earth, and year after year throughout the centuries let it go on producing and reproducing. In that time it will have produced a store that the whole earth could hardly contain. Its production represents a money value more than an atom in comparison. To have saved the grain of corn would have been to lose all it was capable of producing.

The plan of salvation originated in a gift. Without God's gift of His own dear Son to the human family, salvation for any man would be utterly impossible. Without Christ's gift of His own life to fallen men and women, there could be no hope of an endless life of joy beyond the grave.

The gift of Christ forms the foundation of the whole scheme of salvation for lost mankind. The gift of Christ is the keystone in that wondrous arch of redemption which binds two eternities together. The gift of Christ is the all and in all of the whole system which imparts security from sin, in heaven; salvation on earth; and immortality hereafter.

Therefore, seeing that all that we have, and all that we can ever hope to have, emanates from a gift, and is in itself a gift,—to study that gift, to make it our science, our song, and our life, is a duty and pleasure the most supreme that is committed to the candidates for admission into the eternal and universal realms of thought and action and life.

God did not loan Jesus Christ to the human family. The Father did not lend the Son to sinners simply for a few brief years of sojourn here on earth. Nor did the Almighty merely lease His only beloved Son to the world for use during their experiment of sin. Neither did the Father offer His Son as a gift to humanity.

There was neither loan nor lease nor offer, but a gift. Christ was a free gift from the Eternal to the human. The world's Redeemer was not given to be the Son of God. He was given to become the Son of man. He was not only given to man: far greater was the sacrifice of God,—He was given to be man. He was given to be a man in order that He might redeem man. He was a "free gift"—not for three and thirty years; not for the short period of this world's history; but forever, and for evermore.

Through all eternity Christ will never be again what He was before He "gave himself." He will not be less good, He will not be less pure, He will not be less glorious; but so long as the ceaseless ages roll, He will be the Son of man, a member of the lost, the redeemed, the human family. He was a member of the family of God; He gave himself to become a member of the family of man, that by

¹ 2 Cor. 8:7-9. Redeemed, Jesus Saves.

adoption He might cause the children of earth to become the sons and daughters of heaven.

“In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us. ‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.’ He gave Him not only to bear our sins, but to die as our sacrifice; He gave Him to the fallen race.”

God’s gift of His own dear Son to fallen man was a real, not a make-believe, gift. God did really give away His only begotten Son. Christ was the only one of His kind in the universe. To be sure, the angels were all sons of God, but Christ was the only begotten Son of the Father. When God gave Him to the human family, God made a real sacrifice. The Father not only gave His Son to man, but He gave Him to be a man; and through all eternity Christ will never be what He was before the fall of man,—before His own and His Father’s voluntary gift of himself. He is and ever will be divine; His divinity remains unchanged and unchangeable. But every human being who will know in his own life the blest experience of the gift of giving must first know and recognize that gift as a divine reality in the very life and experience of God and of God’s dear Son.

The word “love” is a common one. It is much used. Its meanings are many and various. Sometimes it implies nothing more than admiration. Often it indicates only greed. It may denote personal sentiment and individual affection between men and women. Frequently it is indicative of the most

supreme type of selfishness. It often signifies gross immorality and base passion.

Our ideas of love have become so narrow and so low that if the word be analyzed in relation to the emotions, passions, and actions, to which it is for the most part applied, it will be found to express two of the worst traits of human life—selfishness and lust.

Even at best, human love is often but little better than a form of selfishness. A man loves a woman—why?—Because of his desire to draw her to himself, to possess her,—to have her for his life companion,—to gain her to be exclusively his own.

But the love of God is the absolute opposite of all these things. “God so loved. . . that He gave.” With God loving is giving. “God is love.” With the Eternal One to love is to give. “God is love.” His life is nothing but love. With Him to live is to love, and to love is to give—living is loving, and loving is giving.

Now, therefore, the supreme idea in the love of God is this—It is a love which gives. Any love which does not give is not the love of God at all. It is only human. It is earthly, sensual, devilish. Common affection is not true love. The test of all genuine love is that it has in it the element of giving—yes, that its very essence is self-sacrificial giving. In this, when a man loves a woman it is that he may give to her all human devotion.

There are many in the world who make expensive presents or gifts to others. There are wealthy men who give millions of dollars to different enterprises. Yet much of this giving is pure selfishness. God frowns upon it, because it does not proceed from

right wishes, from noble desires of the heart. A gift may be made with the idea of gaining the favor of some one else. Such gifts, whether made to Christ's cause or to men, are displeasing to God. Many times lavish gifts are bestowed upon great enterprises because the giver desires to become well known and well thought of. This is nothing but pharisaism.

The love of God therefore is a love which gives—gives because of love and loyalty to the cause and object upon which it is bestowed. This giving love, and it alone, is the love of God.

How many times has this and similar testimony been borne: "I am very happy; I feel so much of the love of God in my heart; this faith grows more and more precious to me day by day."

And yet many who utter such words have absolutely no idea of the responsibilities of the love of God—the responsibility to give. He who does not feel the burden upon him to give of his life, to give of his God-entrusted talents, and to give of his property, of his money, to the suffering cause of God, does not know the love of God, for—God so loved. . . that He gave."

My brother, my sister, when you and I kneel down to pray that God will bless the church and hasten on its work with power in the earth, how can we have faith that the Lord will be pleased with that prayer when we are withholding the talents so necessary to make the work go?

It is useless for us to pray to God to bless the work and to tell the Lord how much we love the work when we do not support it by our involvement.

What good does it do to pray for the success of the third angel's message if we do not freely give of our strength and personal commitment necessary to forward it in the earth? Any one who does this simply does not believe the third angel's message at all.

Statesmen and army officers have a saying that "money is the sinews of war." The same is to a great extent true in the warfare now being waged on earth between Christ and His followers on the one side and Satan and his followers on the other side.

In the Bible it is written: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Loving in word and in tongue,—merely talking about the love of God,—making a profession of love,—is a very different thing from possessing the real love of God. The real love of God is a thing of deed, not of word. It is a love which does; it is a love which gives.

God is calling upon us to love His cause. We must hasten to manifest that love in the same way that God Himself manifests it—by giving ourselves. He has said that financial ruin and disgrace are starring His schools in the face. He is calling for gifts, both large and small, to aid our church and school; these instrumentalities, and save them to His cause.

"Therefore, as ye abound in everything, [or gift] in [the gift of] faith, and [in the gift of] utterance, and [in the gift of] knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace [gift] also. I speak not by commandment, but by

occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love” (2 Cor. 8:7-8).

The desire to give manifesting itself in the act of giving is in itself a gift of God. He who rightly gives to the cause of God is exercising a spiritual gift bestowed on him by the Master. This gift God freely bestows upon all who open their hearts and hands liberally to perform it.

Giving is a gift. The exercise of this gift is just as surely the exercise of a gift of God as is the exercise of the gift of faith, or of utterance, or of knowledge, or of prophecy, or of teaching, or of tongues. It is a gift of ministry, and he who exercises it is a minister of the gospel.

A man was asked, “What did you do yesterday?” He replied, “Yesterday I taught a class in Sabbath school. On Tuesday I was working in VBS. On Wednesday I was operating in our Adventist hospital in Holbrook, Arizona. On Thursday I was teaching the Word of God in the Amazon. On Friday I was building a church in Mozambique.” The friend exclaimed, “Man, even in the jet age you cannot do that!” The fellow said, “But I do it every day. I dedicate to the Lord a gift in the church, and it goes all over the earth doing good for Jesus.”

The gift of giving is the gift which proves the sincerity of our love. To all men and women who wish to prove that they possess the love of God, the great apostle commends this gift. By the exercise of the gift of giving, the redeemed of God can prove to all the world and to themselves that they have the love of God abounding in their hearts in deed and in truth.

Remember, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). Now people do not believe that the earth belongs to the Lord, or else they do not deal with Him with the same honesty that they deal with their fellowmen. If the earth belongs to the Lord, then He has the right to control it, and every man ought to yield to Him His own. But, not only do they not believe that the earth belongs to the Lord, but very few even believe that there is any God. Heathen principles prevail not only in the world, but largely among those who call themselves Christians.

Christ taught a parable in Luke 16:1. Let’s look at it. “There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods” (Luke 16:1). That pricks pretty sharp, doesn’t it? What about the years you’ve wasted.

Who accuses? “. . . For the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10). Satan, of course. He says you’ve been living for yourself many years (Zech. 3:1-4). The troubling thing about it is, that these accusations are true. We’ve all had years and talents and opportunities. How many souls have we won with them? You and I are being accused just like this steward. Let’s find out what the man did. It might help us.

There comes a time when we are caught at last, and we face the emptiness of our lives, the uselessness of our being, the realization that if we went into the grave suddenly, there would be

precious little anyone could honestly write on our tombstone except the date of our birth and death, and the words, “Lord have mercy.” Like a dentist drilling in a tooth, Christ is here touching a raw nerve in this parable.

“Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (Eph. 4:7). The grace of God is given to us in Christ. He is the brightness of the Father’s glory (Heb. 1:3), and the grace which God bestows is “according to the riches of His glory.” This grace is given, not to a few, but to all. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). But Christ is “our life” (Col. 3:4). He is not the life of a few only, but of all, for He is “the life” (John 14:6). There is no other life. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). “He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). “The gift by grace” is the gift of life in Christ. Christ, the life, is given to every man, and His life is the manifestation of the manifold grace of God, of which we are appointed stewards. Life, therefore, constitutes the goods which the Householder has committed to our charge.

Verse 2: “And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.” Fired him. “Mayest” in Greek means “You’ve had it!” Strange story. Appears as though Christ is teaching people to be clever rogues.

In verse 3 the manager is faced with three choices: labor, beg, or starve. Perhaps his health wouldn’t permit him to dig, perhaps pride. It’s

interesting that he had nothing for his future. He had been systematically robbing his boss, but now, had spent everything and it went through his hands foolishly and the old man had nothing. He’s too old or sick to work or too proud. He could not beg—too degrading for one of his position in life. To contemplate the manager of the estate sitting by the roadside with a tin cup begging is impossible.

So, he comes up with a clever idea. The boss’s wealth is still in his hands. He still has the combination to the safe. He must figure out a way now to use the master’s goods in a way to secure to himself for future wants so when the master does throw him out, he will have somewhere to go where he could eat and sleep without begging!

So, he began to use the master’s goods not to gather for himself, but to impart to others; to win and influence friends, now.

Verse 4-7. Maybe he gave each a sly wink—“I’m paying 50% off your bill to help you out. I’ve got authority, and I’m rich!” Thus he embezzled his boss’s wealth even more systematically, but now he builds himself a house in the hearts of his people.

By and by, the boss got around to really firing him. As the manager walked away he was tempted to feel dejected. He decided to go to the house of the man who had owed 100 measures of oil, but who he had been forgiven 50. “You know what? After all my years of faithful service, the cruel boss fired me! And I’ve got no pension, no house, no bank account. All I ever had I spent to help others, and here I am.” “Don’t worry,” said the former debtor.

“You stay right here with us. We like you a lot, and as long as we have food, we’ll share half with you just like you shared half with us. Welcome!” So he lived among the people, always received in one house after another.

Quite a tale! Actually, *Christ’s Object Lessons* says some people in the audience who heard it recognized it as exactly what some of the publicans had done themselves. So it hit home.

Verse 8—“The Lord commended the unjust steward.” I like that boss! Most unusual. Most bosses or landowners, when they heard of a deal like this would go into a rage and call the police. This one, when he heard of it, said, “Well, this guy is a rogue, all right; but he surely is a clever one. You’ve got to give him credit for that! He knew how to use his head. And if I can’t commend his honesty, I’ll at least commend his skillful wisdom. That’s worth remarking about.”

Well, you think about it, and it doesn’t seem at all bad that the lord should commend him so. First, consider the steward’s plight. He was going to get fired, and nothing he could do would prevent it now. Too late. Second, it was hopeless for him to try to pay back his debts to the boss at this late hour. He had been embezzling for years, probably, and he was an old man now; if he paid him back at the rate of one million dollars a month, he’d die long before he could finish the debt. So that was useless.

It makes me think of our debt to God. How useless to say to Him, “O Lord, I’ll be good now; just let me pay you back all I owe. I’ll do this and that. Just give me another chance.” No!

Third, there is something else to the story not clear to us at first. This “rich man” was mightily rich—no ordinary rich man. The steward couldn’t hurt him anymore now by distributing the rest of his master’s goods to the poor like he did. He may not have known that, he may have known. But the rich man surely did know it. That’s why he wasn’t angry when he heard what the unjust steward had done. “He’s ruined me anyway,” I can hear the rich man saying; “why get peeved just because he’s given what little else was in the safe to the poor people, so he could make a home for himself when I fired him? Pretty clever, that chap; with a head like that on him, he might make a good governor.”

Actually, I’m sure you’ve recognized by now who the “rich man” is—it’s Christ. He was rich? His blood! His sacrifice on the cross. You and I have made him poor already—2 Cor. 8:9 says so, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” He’s both poor and rich—He’s so poor that nothing you and I could give Him would do him any good; and He’s so rich that nothing we could give him would enrich Him any further. So, he’s perfectly happy now for us to use all we have left of His goods He put in our hands in order to benefit other people. His blood has already been shed. His fortune has already been spent!

And if we have sense enough to do it from now on, the good Lord will commend us just like He did the unjust steward. He might offer us a seat by His side

on His throne, as He promises in Rev. 3:21, for our wisdom in doing what we can do in this late hour!

So, here is His wise advice, in verse 9, to us: “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” (My, this strikes home so hard!) Jesus suddenly changes the whole picture of the Judgment for us. Here we’ve thought of Judgment as the time when we stand before God the Father, Satan at our right side accusing us terribly; we say nothing, just hang our heads; then Christ steps up and says, “Don’t worry, I’ll cover all his sins, let him into heaven,” and the Father says OK, let him in. Now Jesus changes the picture for us radically: “When you fail.” You’re going to get fired, according to this illustration, just like the unjust steward. And that’s true, in a certain sense.

All our works we’ve been depending on will fail us. And there’s precious little any of us have done directly for Christ—I’ve done nothing, I know that. What about you? Any hands? Has anyone enriched Him? No. So here we stand before God, fired, condemned, and Satan about to carry us off triumphantly. Then suddenly, all sorts of people start pleading for us: “You can’t let this man or woman go—he’s my friend; he did this or that for me. I’m going to take him home with me.”

And someone else says, “Yes, he showed me the way to eternal life.” Another: “When I was discouraged, about to give up, he helped me, gave me new hope. I vote for him to be saved.” Someone might even say, “You can’t let Satan take her—she

baked me a loaf of bread, or a pie, and brought it over to me. She helped me make a dress. She comforted me when I was crying on the way home from school. She helped me with my arithmetic homework when I wasn’t her daughter.” “Make to yourselves friends. . .”

Sounds frankly selfish advice, doesn’t it? But it makes a lot of sense. It’s helped me a lot. I used to think that when I got into difficulty in the Judgment, the angels would help me out by saying, “I saw him praying. I saw him reading the Bible. I saw him reading EGW. He kept his eyes closed during prayer. When he was tempted to kick Billy, he didn’t do it. I was rather depending on the angels to bail me out like that. Now I see that what they say won’t matter much. It’s what “friends” I’ve been able to make “of the mammon of unrighteousness” and they are not the angels.

Now, we must clear up one misunderstanding. Christ is not talking about the common ordinary run-of-the-mill friends like we go fishing with, play tennis with, study with, work with in the office, etc. You may have thousands of such friends, and still be in real trouble in the Judgment day. You see, the whole point of Christ’s advice is, “that they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” You get the point? The only friends who can help you in the Judgment day are those whom you have saved, who can say that they are there because of what you have done for them. You may have ten thousands friends, but if they will all be lost in the Judgment day, they won’t help you.

I told you before we started that there would be a sharp prick in this parable today. But do not be discouraged. As you go home today, be hopeful, be encourage. The Judgment day is not yet—that's something to be very glad about. You still have the opportunity to make to yourself friends of the "mammon of unrighteousness"—and note it does not say, "make to yourselves friends *with* the mammon of unrighteousness." "Of" is the correct word, or "out of." Of course, it means use money wisely. *Tithe*. But it means more than that. He says, in effect: "Make to yourselves friends by capitalizing on the methods of the unjust steward, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

Though it may appear to you to be selfish, use every resource available to you, your money, your time, your talents, your words, your influence, your affections, in order to win souls. Then, when you are fired, when life is at an end, when you face your judgment, those friends whom you have won to everlasting life will welcome you into the New Jerusalem. If you don't have a mansion there yourself, you can at least be welcomed into their mansions. And if they welcome you, you can be sure the Lord, the "Rich Man" of the parable, will commend you heartily! So much so, that He will welcome you, too!

Let us pray: Lord, we thank You for this lesson from Christ's parable. Its deep, penetrating wisdom moves our souls. We are so glad that we have a chance still to make friends for everlasting life. Let us see today how we can do it. As we go home,

open our eyes to see all the opportunities we have to loosen the debts and burdens of others about us feel, to undo the heavy burdens, to break every yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to help these souls who feel like they owe the rich man, The Master, Yourself, so much that they cannot pay and who feel burdened because of their debt which conscience has built. Teach us, Lord, how to sit down with them and show them how the debts are paid, so they can walk at liberty. Give us words to say to help the discouraged, the tempted, the hopeless. Show us what we can do. We ask in Christ's name, Amen.