

MANAGING YOUR TALENTS FOR CHRIST

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A man apparently didn't know where he was in the middle of the night and went to the wrong house and began knocking on the door. He couldn't understand what was being said to him from the inside. The man inside was equally distressed and didn't know what to do. He told the unknown man outside to stop it or he'd shoot. The poor fellow on the outside didn't know what was going on—all he knew was somebody ought to open the door when he knocked, so he kept on banging on the door. Whereupon the man inside pulled the trigger and shot the fellow. The ambulance rushed him off to the hospital.

The pastor of our church there wondered if anyone would visit the wounded fellow in the hospital. Well, he thought, "I have many people to visit; it's not my duty. I'm pastor to this church. I must visit our own members, or others who have either asked me to come or have friends who have asked me to come." So he dismissed the thought and forgot about the case.

Then a strange providence occurred. A certain man whom he had been visiting some off and on had suffered an accident and was in the hospital. So he went that afternoon. He talked with him. He noticed a curtain pulled around the bed in the corner next to his. He hadn't been visiting long when an anxious voice called out from behind the curtains, "Is there a priest there? a minister?" He

didn't say anything for a moment—thought it wasn't his place to answer. Then the voice persisted, "Is there a priest or minister there? I want him to come pray with me." The patient he was visiting told him, "Yes," then said to me, "That man wants to see you."

When a sight! It didn't take an x-ray to see what was inside of him. He'd had an abdominal operation and everything had gone bad, apparently. He was afraid. He was being readied for a second operation. The pastor repeated the 23rd Psalm to him, then held his hand and prayed. He didn't tell him to pray, but the first sentence he prayed, he repeated after the pastor, and so on until it was ended. He knew nothing of his case—no one else seemed to know, but he was deeply impressed with his forthrightness. He needed help, and asked for it. The patient asked, "What church are you from?" He told him, and he had no prejudice. He gripped his hand tight like he meant business. He wanted something.

The next morning, the pastor chatted with him until a nurse ran him out. He asked her what was wrong with him. She said he had been shot in the abdomen. "Why?" He had gone up to the wrong door one night, and the occupant had shot him.

"Why did you go to the wrong door?" He said, "I was drunk, and didn't know." He looked him right in the eye. "Are you an alcoholic?" "Yes." "Do you know what I mean—I didn't ask if you drink some—are you an alcoholic—so you can't stop?" "Yes." "Are you married?" "No." "Never have been?" "Yes," he said, but my wife left me because of alcohol."

“Do you think you can stop by yourself without God’s help?” he asked. “Well, I’ve tried, but can’t.” Then the nurse came, sent him away. He was not supposed to have visitors.

I think of the song, “Lord, lay some soul upon my heart, and love that soul through me; and help me now to do my part to win that soul to Thee. Lord, lay some soul upon my heart!”

Ever since I was a youth, there have been many things I have wanted to do—write good stories or essays, be a great business man, climb mountains. But the great ambition I’ve had is to win some soul to Christ—really win them—not just to get them to join the church, but win them so I can enjoy their company in heaven for eternity. When I was a youth, how I wished I might know how to do that successfully. I still do! “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.” Proverbs 11:30.

It’s a most wonderful work. Suppose I could play the organ like Mark, or sing like an operatic baritone, what really good would that do? or be a champion wrestler, or baseball player, or climb Mt. Everest, or even get to be President of the United States? Anything I do to build myself up, to seek applause from men, to enjoy the limelight, is only temporary, and is really meaningless. I know someone now who was in the limelight, a singer, dancer, popular, but now she is very wretched—has never won a soul, never saved anyone else. She has no such memories to brighten the darkness.

My friend, you and I want to enjoy life to the full, now; and later on, to have the assurance that in the

kingdom to come, there will be people there who will take us by the hand and thank us for leading them to salvation. Daniel 12:1 speaks of the great time of trouble, “there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time” following the greatest time of peace and prosperity ever known in the world. Satan deliberately foments materialistic luxury so people will forget what is coming.

During this time of prosperity, luxury, ease, pleasure, some people turned away from the bright lights, the dances, the entertainment, the lazy luxury of idleness, and worked to win souls: “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12:3).

Have you ever been downtown on a clear starry night, looked at the smudgy glow of the street lights, and then peered beyond to the clear sparkling beauty of the stars? I don’t think this text is speaking only of great evangelists, or any of the preachers who get paid a salary for full time preaching and baptizing people. It’s a wonderful work, yes. I think it refers mostly to people who aren’t paid a salary, but who still were wise enough to win souls. (“He that winneth souls is wise”), who had courage to refuse temptations to bury themselves in money-making or pleasure-seeking, who find recreation and fun, may I put it, in turning others to Christ.

Christ taught a parable in Luke 16:1. Let’s look at it. Something might prick you pretty sharp in this

parable, so don't look unless you are prepared for 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). Who accused? 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" (Revelation 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.