

Parables from Luke 12

The Lord Jesus has been emphasising the character of a **true** disciple. He does not worry about material things (12.22-28) but rather seeks after spiritual things (12.29-34). In addition, a **faithful** servant is one who *walks* with loins girded, *witnesses* with lights burning, *waits* with eagerness and *watches* with readiness for his lord (12.35-40).

The Parable of the Faithful Stewards (Luke 12.41-48)

Peter interrupts the Lord and asks whether this parable (vv.35-40) was for the disciples' benefit or for all. The Lord Jesus responds by indicating that He was speaking to His stewards, i.e. all those who are, or claim to be the servants of God. They would prove by their stewardship that they were either 'faithful and wise' (vv.42-44) or unfaithful and foolish (vv.45-46). A steward was one who was appointed as a manager of household affairs whilst the lord of the house was away. He had a responsibility towards **others** as part of his duties would involve the distribution of food or 'measure of corn'. What kind of man would be put in charge of such important duties? Surely one who was 'faithful' and 'wise' (v.42). Such a person would prove dependable and discharge his duties reliably. On the return of the lord he would be rightly rewarded with further responsibility (vv.43-44). In the correct interpretation of this 'parable', the reward relates primarily to authority and governmental rule during the millennium (cf. Matthew 25.21, 1 Peter 5.1-4).

The Lord Jesus is teaching that all true disciples have a responsibility (or stewardship) towards God which involves taking a genuine interest in the spiritual welfare of others. All believers are stewards. We are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4.1-2) and the grace of God (1 Peter 4.10). In other words, we have all been given the Word of God and spiritual gift/s. It is our responsibility to communicate and explain the Word of God as well as use our spiritual gifts for the blessing of others. In other words, let us seek to set the spiritual 'measure of corn' (i.e. Christ) before others. Note. Peter's stewardship (John 21.15-17, 1 Peter 5.2).

Will we prove to be faithful and wise in the discharge of this responsibility? **Faithful** stewards are trustworthy and reliable. **Wise** stewards are thoughtful and careful. Most of all, the faithful and wise steward will be found engaging devotedly in this work until his Lord returns. Note the following verses about those who were faithful and/or wise: Matthew 7.24, Acts 16.15, 1 Corinthians 1.9, 24, 4.2, 17, Galatians 3.9, Colossians 1.7, 4.7, 9, Hebrews 2.17, 3.2.

On the other hand, the **same** servant/steward may not prove to be so faithful (v.45). He may seek to abuse the responsibility he has been given and use it for his own gain. Again, the Pharisees fit this description well. They had a knowledge of the Word of God (cf. 'delayeth his coming', v.46-47) and professed to be servants of God, yet instead of feeding the flock they mistreated the people and led lives that were less than holy. Such a servant is only a professor and will in fact be punished with unbelievers by being severely scourged ('cut in sunder', v.46). The reference to 'day' and 'hour' (v.46) reminds us again that this has particular relevance to the tribulation period. The word 'hour' speaks of the climax of His appearing whilst the word 'day' refers to the period leading up to this (note the use of two different Greek words translated 'end' in Matthew 24). During the tribulation period, many of God's true servants will be mistreated and abused by those who profess to know God (cf. Matthew 25.41-46). There will also be some who did not receive the light of the Word of God as the Pharisees did (v.48). They are still sinners and will be punished (although less severely) for they were willingly ignorant or indifferent to the light of creation (Romans 1.19-32).

We do well to note the fundamental principle of service and stewardship in v.48: *To whomsoever much has been given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been entrusted, of him a larger amount will be demanded.* The greater the privilege (Word of God? Gift?), the greater the responsibility to live in the light of it/use it. We should remember, whatever God has entrusted us with, we should do it faithfully for His glory. Luke 19.17: *And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.*

The Example of the Faithful Steward (Luke 12.49-53)

The Perfect Servant now speaks of His work illustrating yet further examples of true discipleship. He had:

- **Come to send fire on the earth** (v.49). Fire **examines** with the result of **revealing** (1 Cor. 3.13-15). He had come to examine and reveal the motives and attitudes of men and women towards God. *CA Coates: It necessarily follows that if God brings in what is of Himself (i.e. Christ) it judges everything not of Himself.* These would be revealed through the responses of men and women to His Person, but primarily to His death and resurrection. There could be no middle ground. Christ and His cross is the great dividing line of all mankind.
- **A baptism to be baptized with** (v.50). This speaks of the awful suffering of His death. It would be an immersion in divine judgment (cf. Matthew 20.22-23, Psalm 69.1-2) and yet He was 'straightened' (pressed on every side)

until it be accomplished, i.e. He had a great desire and burden to accomplish the Father's will even though it involved the suffering of Calvary. What about us? Do we have a burning desire to fulfil the will of God in our lives, even if it leads to persecution and loss (Philippians 3.8)?

- **Come to bring division** (vv.51-53). The Person and work of the Lord Jesus brings division (cf. John 7.43, 9.16, 10.19). Men and women must make a decision for or against the Christ.

Teaching the Crowd (Luke 12.54-59)

The Lord Jesus, now speaking to the crowd, makes a strong appeal in the light of coming judgment to get right with God. **It was time to choose the right side!** He had spoken much of the hypocrisy and profession of the Pharisees, but the people were in grave danger of making the same mistakes (v.56). The people were weather-wise. They could accurately observe the sky and confidently predict the coming weather, but they couldn't accurately observe the spiritual significance of the events happening around them and the judgment which would inevitably follow their rejection of Christ. They were correct in their observations of physical things, but blind in their observation of spiritual things. **They had worldly intelligence, but no spiritual understanding.** What was the reason for their spiritual blindness and lack of spiritual understanding? Hypocrisy (v.46)!! They pretended to have an interest in the things of God, but really their interest was elsewhere. Is this like us? Far too much worldly wisdom and understanding, but paupers in the sanctuary?

Israel was now on trial. They each individually stood accused (note the use of 'thee', v.59). Was it not obvious that the accused would try and settle the matter out of court before it was too late and they were thrown into prison (v.58)? Likewise, it was time for the nation to get right with God before they came to life's final court. If they rejected Christ, justice must take its course and judgment would fall. The nation itself would face the destruction of AD70 and the 'prison' of the current dispensation and future tribulation (cf. Isaiah 40.2, **Luke 21.24**, 1 Thessalonians 2.16).

The Parable of the Fruitless Fig Tree (Luke 13.1-9)

The section (from 12.1) now concludes with a continued appeal by the Lord Jesus for the people to repent. Some of the crowd told the Lord Jesus of the Galileans who had been slaughtered by Pilate whilst offering sacrifices. It may be that these Galileans had broken some Roman law or taken part in an uprising against them. The actions of Pilate caused the enmity between himself and Herod Antipas (cf. Luke 23.12). It would seem as if the statement of v.1 was a response by the people to the condemnation of 12.58-59. It was as if they were saying that they recognised when the judgment of God was at work. In fact they were wrong (vv.2-3). Any calamity or atrocity should remind us that life is fragile and except we all repent, we shall all face a lost eternity (v.3). The Lord Jesus then uses a second example (vv.4-5) to illustrate the same point. What is clear is that the Jews did not understand God. Catastrophe was no proof of special sin (cf. John 9.2). This was not God's method. The Lord Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree (vv.6-9) to illustrate the true principles of divine government.

In the parable, the vineyard is Israel (Isaiah 5, Psalm 80.8-9) and the fig tree the Jewish remnant which returned from captivity in Babylon. The 'certain man' is God who sought fruit for three years (the length of the Lord's public ministry so far) and found none (vv.6-7, cf. Isaiah 5.2, Matthew 21.19). The 'dresser of his vineyard' is the Lord Jesus who intercedes that the tree might be given another year (being the remaining time of the Lord's public ministry and the witness of the Holy Spirit in the early book of the Acts, cf. Acts 13.46) to bring forth more fruit. If there was still no fruit, the tree would be cut down (destruction of Jerusalem in AD70).

Note the important practical lessons concerning God's true principles of divine government:

- The judgments of God are rooted in righteousness. He is the owner of the vineyard, the vine and the fig tree. He has the right to interfere with it as He sees fit. We should remember that we are all guilty sinners and without excuse. The fact that any of us are spared is a wonder!
- The judgments of God are exercised in absolute patience (cf. Isaiah 5.2, Matthew 21.19, 33-37). When John the Baptist spoke of this tree (Luke 3.9), the axe was already laid at its root awaiting the order from the Owner. If the Dresser of the vineyard had not interceded for the tree, then it would have already been cut down. It was living on **borrowed time**.
- Every opportunity is given to mankind to bring forth fruits meet for repentance (Matthew 3.8, Luke 3.8). This includes the ministry of the Lord Jesus and Holy Spirit. It was not as if the tree had been left to do the best it could in poor conditions. Rather, it had the best of opportunities to be fruitful (Isaiah 5.1-2).

For believers today, we do well to remember that we have every opportunity to be fruitful. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and enjoy the ministry of the Lord Jesus as Great High Priest. If we do not produce fruit to God's satisfaction, we cannot be spared indefinitely (cf. 1 Corinthians 9.27). We are living on borrowed time (2 Peter 3.9-12)! *Colossians 4.5: Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.*