

Grace and Mercy in the Kingdom of God

Luke 16:1-15 (v. 15)

Introduction

What are people in the world looking for today? They focus on things like money, power, having a good time, independence, safety, security, and things. But all this is a means to an end. People's lives are in turmoil, and they are hoping to find peace in them. But they don't understand the reason for the turmoil. We were created in the image of God, for the purpose of living in fellowship with and worshiping Him. But when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they died, just as God said they would. They died in two ways that day. Their bodies began to wear out as physical death entered the world. They also died spiritually as their sin separated them from God. Death is separation from God. We are all born with a God-sized, God-shaped hole in our lives only He can fill. That is the source of the turmoil. But people don't know where to look and try to fill that hole with anything they can. The Bible tells us how to fill that hole and get back into fellowship with God.

The Unjust Steward and the Kingdom of God

This parable of the Unjust Steward is troubling. Jesus seems to approve of a man getting rewarded for chicanery. Let's take a closer look at the story.

Relationships

This story addresses four main classes of people in Jesus' day. There were the elite, who were the wealthy landowners. Then there were stewards, who were technically slaves, even though they oversaw the possessions of the wealthy. There was the class of merchants and tradesmen, who also relied on the wealthy to be able to buy, sell, and trade goods. Then there were the peasants, who were at the mercy of the wealthy, either as day laborers, beggars, or slaves. Everyone depended on the wealthy, so they were despised or held in contempt. And since stewards had charge of the wealth and goods, they were held in contempt by the merchants and peasants as well.

The Steward's Plight

The steward is being fired for mismanagement of the rich man's funds. We aren't told whether he is guilty or not; there is no trial or investigation. The rich man hears the charges and pronounces sentence. The steward won't be demoted; he will be let go. Being fired as a steward, his only options for survival will be to work as a day-laborer or exist by begging. Since he isn't accustomed to manual labor, he wouldn't be hired as a day-laborer and would be forced to resort to begging. Jesus' audience of mostly peasants were eating this up.

The Steward's Solution

The steward comes up with a plan to ingratiate his master's debtors to him, so they will take him in after he's fired. He has them come in one by one and cuts their debt by up to 50%. The bill included interest and the steward's "cut." So, his master is not out that much. But this makes his master look good in the eyes of his debtors, because they think he's authorized this, for a steward wouldn't have authority to change a bill. It also puts the master in a hard place. Now, if he fires the steward, he

will be despised by the people again. Jesus' audience really loved this, as the hated rich man is in a bind, too.

The Steward's Reward

Instead of getting fired, the steward is commended by his master for his shrewd actions. You may be thinking, "Where's the justice? How can this represent the kingdom of God?" That's what Jesus' audience were thinking as well. They were shocked by this reversal. The kingdom of God is supposed to be just because God is just, righteous, and holy.

The World on Its Ear

The kingdom of God turns the world on its ear. Entrance into the kingdom isn't about justice. If it were, it would be impossible for us to get in. Entrance into the kingdom of God is about grace and mercy.

What the World Needs to Hear

And that's what the world needs to hear. We must take a stand for the truth of the Word of God. But we can't forget to preach the Gospel as well as the Law (Read **2 Corinthians 3:12-16**). The veil of the Law must be removed by the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God. The **Formula of Concord** says: *By such preaching people are first led into the Law correctly—after Moses' veil has been removed (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. V, p. 9).*

Law without Gospel

Over the years, the church has been accused of judgmentalism. That's what happens when all people hear is the Law. As Martin Luther said: *Whenever the Law alone exercises its office, without the Gospel being added, there is nothing but death and hell, and one must despair, as Saul and Judas did (Smalcald Articles, Pt. 3, Art. III, p. 7).* Entrance into the kingdom of God is about grace and mercy."

Means of Grace

We access that grace through the means of grace, Word, and Sacrament. Through them God fills that void in our lives and calms the turmoil. Through Christ's death and resurrection, He reconciles us to Himself and welcomes us into His kingdom, His kingdom of grace and mercy.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
