

The Parables of Jesus

- The Wise and Foolish Servants

(Luke 12:42-48)

Our parable is another parable in which Jesus used at least two times as we find it in Luke 12:42-48 and Matthew 24:45-51. As in the parable just prior to our parable, "The Goodman of the House and the Thief" in which Jesus uses a parable twice, it served two distinct purposes. The first purpose concerned His

first appearance on the earth and the response by the religious leaders. The second use was at the end of His ministry as He was teaching His disciples concerning His return and second coming. As we will see, it is the same with our "Parable of the Wise and Foolish Servants."

We will first discuss Jesus' use of this parable as found in Luke 12:42-48. Jesus gave this parable during the time of teaching when He was with His disciples and a crowd of followers, as well as Pharisees, scribes and other religious leaders while He was on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He was discussing and using a series of parables concerning a warning to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." (Luke 12:1)

The context and background of this parable, as just mentioned was to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." Basically Jesus was warning His listeners concerning the hypocrisy and incorrect attitude of heart that was corrupting the religious leaders and therefore corrupting the true message of God to His people. Our parable is found in the midst of this discourse. We see that while Jesus was teaching, Peter asked a question to which Jesus responded with our parable.

In Luke 12:41, we read that Peter asks Jesus, "...Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?" Peter wanted to know if all of the things that Jesus had just taught them concerning the "leaven of the Pharisees" were directed to just them or to everyone, including the Pharisees. Jesus answered Peter's question with this "parable." Actually, this Parable has "two parts" to it.

Part 1 of the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Stewards

- Luke 12:42-44 - "... Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath."

In "Part 1" of this parable, Jesus speaks about a "faithful and wise steward." A "steward" is a servant with a higher level of trust and responsibility than the other servants. A "steward" would basically be considered a "manager," who is entrusted to watch over his master's assets as well as the other servants.

The "traditional" view of this entire parable has always been of the thinking that Jesus was speaking "prophetically" of His second coming. This is not necessarily incorrect for Jesus uses this same parable in Matthew 24:45-51 where He most definitely is speaking about the end times and His second coming, as we will discuss later.

However, in the context of the entire teaching setting, along with all the other parables beginning from Luke 12:1 up to this point, we have been seeing that Jesus was actually referring to the religious leaders of the Jewish people of that day of His, their Messiah's, first appearance. In this first part of the parable Jesus is speaking about those who have been faithful in doing the things of God, praying and being watchful for the Messiah's return.

We should not be under the impression that **all** the leadership and **all** the people were in "la la land" concerning Messiah's coming. Nor were they all corrupt. There are many scripture references that show us that there were those, even at that time, who were found to be faithful and watching and preparing for the Messiah's coming – both Jew and Gentile.

Here are just a few

- Simeon was found to be "faithful." He was so faithful that God told him that he would see His Messiah in his lifetime - Luke 2:25-35
- Anna, the prophetess, was faithfully praying in the Temple area over 80 years for the desire of her heart to be fulfilled. God fulfilled the desire of her heart - Luke 2:36-38
- The Magi that came from the east (Persia) looking for the "King" that the prophecies had foretold of. They could have been Persian Gentiles or Persian converts to Judaism. They had studied the scriptures that the Jews brought with them when they were taken into captivity to Babylon. When Babylon was conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire, the scriptures came into their hands and they studied them. They were faithfully looking in these scriptures concerning a "coming King." They believed the scriptures and then acted promptly by going and "following a star" so they could worship this mighty King that the scriptures foretold of - Matthew 2:1,2
- John, the Baptist and his disciples - Matthew 3:1-17 – I believe this is self explanatory.
- Nicodemus came in the night to see if Jesus was the "One" because Nicodemus was looking for the Messiah to come. - John 3:1,2
- Jesus encountered many sincere people who asked Him with great anticipation and hope that He might be the One that they have been waiting for. Some of these may have been the Essenes from the community of Qumran where the Dead Sea scrolls were found. We do specifically hear them mention but if we look closely in the Gospel accounts we can see their presence and their faithfulness to Jesus.

Jesus declared that those who were anxiously awaiting and being diligently faithful in doing the righteous things of God, not knowing when their "lord" would come but believing that He would come, were the ones whom the lord/master declared to be "blessed" because of their faithfulness. The term, "blessed" here means to be "happy, joyful and spiritually prosperous in the blessings of God." They would be so blessed that they would be envied by others. The purpose of them being blessed would be to point those others to their Lord, their Master.

Those faithful stewards were considered "wise" because they did not look at outward, natural situations or circumstances that would seem as if their Master might not come or be delayed. Their faith in God's promise and the Messiah's coming did not waver. They did not grow weary because their Master did not come in their timing. It did not matter to them, they were just faithful in doing their "Father's business." It did not matter to them when Messiah would come. They simply believed and trusted that He would come.

Notice, Jesus says that it would be people like that who would be given the responsibility to rule over all that the Master has. Why? It was because of their faithfulness and trustworthiness. Jesus called those stewards who He would find doing what they were entrusted to do no matter when or at what time their Master, their Lord, Jesus would come - "wise."

Part 2 of the Parable

- Luke 12:45-48 - *"But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."*

This section of the parable again concerns a "steward" or servant that has been entrusted to watch over, care for and tend to the needs of the master's household. The use of the word "but" to begin verse 45 is a word that always expresses a differential from the preceding thought. In verses 42-44, Jesus expressed the correct attitude of heart that a steward/servant should have concerning their responsibility towards their master and their master's assets. With the word "but," Jesus takes us into a different scenario.

In this second part of the parable, Jesus gives three scenarios - all of which are not good.

Scenario #1 - But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

In this scenario Jesus tells us that as the master delayed, we begin to truly see what the real attitude of heart was of this particular steward. It was corrupt and full of corruption. Remember, Jesus was referring to a "steward" – one who was given a greater responsibility in the household. This steward did not portray what his master's heart would truly be. Actually, instead of portraying the good role model and protecting the character of his master, he actually was betraying his master.

This steward's heart was really all about himself. He did not care for the other servants for he treated them harshly. He became a harsh taskmaster even to the point of beating them. He began to think only of himself and his needs, wants and desires. It became all about him and not what he was entrusted by the master to do. Notice, He became "drunk," not just with wine but also with what he thought was power. He literally usurped the real master's authority all the while thinking that when the real master did come he would go back to acting as the master's faithful steward. In other words, this steward was a hypocrite!!

He was a pretender. Just acting the part of being a faithful steward when His master was around but when he thought His master was not watching, his real attitude of heart was revealed. Paul writes of this as he encourages the believer in Ephesians 6:5-7 – *“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; **Not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men...**”*

Obviously, Jesus is referring to the Pharisees as well as other religious leaders and their harsh rules and regulations of "tradition" that they placed upon the Jewish people. They misused and abused the authority over the Jewish people that God had entrusted them with. The "seemingly delay" of Messiah gave time for what was in their hearts to be exposed. The real attitude of heart within this steward was one of greed, covetousness and self-centeredness. Hmmm.... This sounds very similar to what Jesus expressed in the prior parables concerning the "leaven of the Pharisees."

The consequences of their actions would be even harsher than what they gave out to the people. Jesus tells us that they will be "cut asunder" and their place would now be with that of the "unbelievers." The word used here for "unbeliever" is the Greek word "*apistos*" which means one who is "unfaithful, faithless, unbelieving, incredulous and without trust (in God)." Truly these unscrupulous stewards would one day "reap what they had sown." (Galatians 6:7-8) These unfaithful, cruel "stewards" would have no place in the masters' Household.

In the context of Peter's question concerning who Jesus was speaking to and within the context of this entire teaching setting concerning to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees," Jesus in this section of the parable, was referring to the Pharisees and religious leaders of that day.

They began to usurp the authority given to them by God as priests and began to place harsh rules and regulations, known as "traditions of men," upon the Jewish people. Jesus was warning and telling the religious leaders of that day that the consequences of their actions would be severe. The Pharisees and leaders who placed these hardships over the people and desired "power" would have no place in the Master's (Jesus) "Household of faith."

Scenario #2 - And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

In this scenario, Jesus provides another example of a "foolish" steward. The Greek word used in this verse for the term "prepared" is "*hetoimazō*." It literally means "to make ready; prepare; to make the necessary preparations, get everything ready." However, this word is often used metaphorically, in the sense that it draws from the oriental/eastern custom of sending out people/workers to prepare and level the roads and make them passable to prepare for the return of a king from a journey that he was returning from. It was literally to "prepare the way" for the king's return.

The use of this "metaphoric concept" by Jesus is obvious. The "steward," in this scenario, whom the master had entrusted to "prepare the way" for his return, did not do his assigned task. In referring to the religious leadership of the Jewish people, Jesus was saying that even though there may have been some of them that knew what was required of them by God – to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming of their Messiah - they chose not to do their task.

It may have been that because of the "delay," the servant became "weary in his well doing." Whatever the reason, this servant's heart began to change towards his master. This "delay" by the master ultimately exposed a flaw that was deep within that servant's heart towards his master.

Jesus makes a very important point in this section of the parable. He tells us that this servant knew his master's will. He knew what his master expected. He knew how his master expected him to "prepare the way" for his return. However, this servant chose not to follow his master's will. He chose not to be prepared, faithful, loyal or watchful for his master's coming.

The scriptures were clear concerning what the Pharisees and religious leaders were entrusted by God to do. Their role and "job description" was to be faithful in doing the will of the Father. As the spiritual leadership whom God had entrusted His people with, they were to bring the Jewish people to a place of "preparing the way" and being ready for their Messiah.

Isaiah 40:4 tells us - *"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."*

We know that John the Baptist had done just this. As previously discussed, he was a "wise steward." However, the religious leadership should have been doing this as well. When John the Baptist came declaring this "preparation" for the Messiah, it should have stirred and awakened the hearts of the leadership to repent and go and do what they were entrusted by God to do. They should have joined in with the message to, "Prepare the way of the Lord" and "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Unfortunately, we know they did not.

Whatever the reason or excuse, the spiritual leadership failed to keep the Jewish people's hearts and minds fixed on being ready. They failed to "prepare the way" for their Messiah. Unfortunately, Jesus declares that there will be a harsh consequence for their actions. - "... *he shall be beaten with **many stripes**.*"

Scenario #3 - *But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.*

Jesus continues with another scenario in this section concerning “foolish stewards.” He tells His listeners that there are those that did not know the will of their master. Even though they did not necessarily know the master or his will, yet these “stewards” treated the people harshly and severely, they will still receive a consequence of “**few stripes.**” Jesus was speaking here to the civil leaders over the Jewish people of that day. This is referring to the Jewish secular authorities (such as Herod sons who were civil leaders and tetrarchs in Israel), as well as the Romans, or we can say the Gentiles.

In this Jesus was stating that “built within” every person, Jew or Gentile, there is a deep down understanding of how to treat others. Acts 17:26 tells us that we are all “one blood.” We come from the same parents, Adam and Eve. The Book of Romans, chapters one and two, tell us that nature itself and every living thing was created with a grasp of knowing right from wrong. In other words, no one can truly claim “ignorance.” Yet the sinful nature dominates and we treat each other harshly and do terrible and sinful things. However, Jesus states that their judgment and condemnation shall not be as great as that of the wicked Jews who did know the Lord's will. The principle is that the closer one has been given the privilege to stand as a representative of God, the greater their responsibility and the greater their responsibility, the greater their punishment for being unfaithful.

Jesus ends this parable by giving the main theme of not just this parable but it is at the crux of this whole discourse of teaching beginning in Luke 12:1 to “*beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.*” He states an important truth concerning anyone and everyone who has been entrusted with and given the position of being in any leadership position - religious or secular. “*For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*” God requires a greater accountability from those in any position of leadership. He is also stating that those in leadership, because they are in the position of leadership, are expected by their people to do their job and be good leaders (good stewards).

In the context of Peter's question concerning whom Jesus was speaking to, we can see that through this parable Jesus was speaking to every facet of leadership and anyone in any type of authority in those days – Pharisees, Scribes, all religious leaders, Jewish secular leaders and even Gentile authorities. Ultimately, the scripture tells us that all positions of leadership come from and is given by God for the purpose of watching over His creation, whether it is in the religious arena or in the secular world.

Psalms 75:6-7 - “*For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. 7 But God is the judge: **he putteth down one, and setteth up another.***”

Romans 13:1 - “*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: **the powers that be are ordained of God.***”

God requires a greater accountability from those in any position of leadership or authority. It does not matter - Jew, Greek, Gentile, male or female - if given a position of authority, God requires much of you in treating your fellow people, saved or unsaved, as He would treat them. They are to be God's representatives, His ambassadors. God's leadership must be free from greed, pride and corruption. God entrusts and requires those in leadership position to continually prepare their people for their Messiah. The religious leaders and secular leaders of Jesus' day failed to do this.

Now it would be time for the new leadership He was raising up to learn from the failures of these leaders. Jesus, through this parable, was talking about the character and attitude of heart of what His disciples should be as they prepare to become leaders in this new move of God which would become the Body of Christ.

As previously mentioned, Jesus gave a little different rendering of this parable a second time in Matthew 24:45-51, towards the end of His ministry here on earth. If Jesus thought that it was important enough to share this parable a second time to His disciples than we must recognize that there must be a major message that He wanted to convey to His disciples, both at that time and to us, today. The major reason and emphasis in using this parable a second time was to make sure His disciples, both then and today, are ready and prepared for what lies ahead concerning the end times and Jesus' return and what their responsibility would be.

In Matthew 24:3, Mark 13:3 and Luke 21:7, we see while on the Mount of Olives, Jesus was asked by His disciples, "...when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" In Matthew 24:4-28; Mark 13:4-27 and Luke 21:6-28, Jesus went into a dissertation of the "signs of those times." He then proceeds to use a series of parables in which our parable is the third. Remember, in its context within this teaching setting with His disciples, Jesus is using this parable to answer their question "...when shall these things be?"

Matthew 24:45-51 - *"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

In this usage of the parable we see that Jesus uses the term "evil servant" in place of "foolish servant." Jesus was prophesying to those who would be entrusted with leadership positions within the Body of Christ as well as civil authorities upon His return. When He comes for the second time the same judgment will occur, as He spoke concerning the religious leaders of the day of His first coming. If He finds the "attitude of heart" of those entrusted to "prepare the way" for His return is not correct towards his beloved creation - saved or unsaved.

Remember, God has given all positions of leadership and authority for the purpose of His will to be accomplished - both within the church and within every other aspect of life - civil, business or secular. Severe will be the consequences for those "evil servants" who, when He returns, He finds are hypocrites, who misuse their God given authority, and usurp and misrepresent the Master.

The lesson of the parable is clear to His disciples both back then and to His disciples of that "generation" of His return, whenever that may be. It may be for us, today, as He may return in our "generation." Jesus states, "**Blessed**" will be those who, when Jesus returns, He finds being a faithful and wise steward over His beloved "assets," His creation. Those that are found "faithful" and "wise" will rule and reign along with their Master, Jesus, during His millennial rule and reign over this earth.

Those who are not watchful, ready or prepared shall be cut asunder, and find their lot with the hypocrites. Jesus again uses the phrase that is threaded throughout these last few "end time parables" for those who are found not to be His true disciples - *"there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Those within Church leadership today **must heed** this warning by Jesus in these last days. The question we need to ask ourselves is this, "Are we **portraying** our Master to this world and to His Church as He should be portrayed?" "Are we preparing His people, as well as the world for His return?" Or are we instead, **betraying** our Master though we know His will by not preparing ourselves or those that He has entrusted to us. The choice is up to each of us, individually. Are we going to choose to be the "wise servant" or the "foolish and evil servant?" Choose you this day who you will serve – yourself or the Lord.