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“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 27”

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Luke 16:14-15

14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided [Jesus].

15 And [Jesus] said to them, **“You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

The “all these things” which the Pharisees heard was the parable in first part of this chapter which recounted the episode of the unjust steward, who was in charge of his master’s commodity investments. The steward was told by his master that he was being dismissed from his position as steward because the master discovered that the steward was wasting his goods. The steward did not want to leave his employment as a broker because the only other positions for which he considered himself qualified involved either manual labor or begging. So, the steward decided to use his master’s investments to recruit the people who were in debt to the master as potential employers by giving them a discount that reduced their indebtedness, which, of course, reduced the amount of revenue that the master received from them. **Luke 16:5-7** records:

5 “So [the unjust steward] called every one of his master’s debtors to him, and said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

6 And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ So he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’

7 Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ So he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’

You might expect that the master would be displeased when he found out that the steward was giving discounts to benefit himself at the expense of the master. Surprisingly, the master was not displeased, but rather commended the steward. Jesus says, in **Luke 16:8**:

8 So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

When I first read this parable many years ago, I was puzzled by the master’s positive response to losing revenue. But now, I have a positive interpretation of the parable. I recognize

that the master in the story represents God, who is displeased with us when we disobey His word, and is pleased with us when we repent, turning from disobedience to obedience.

The steward pleased God by reducing the amount that he was charging the debtors. Logically, then, the steward must have been charging the debtors too much in the first place, which is normal in the world of business, and God was pleased because the steward repented and decided to reduce the charges, just as the stores are reducing charges now to move merchandise. If the steward was charging too much, it is most likely that the steward was charging the debtors usury, which we call interest, on their indebtedness, which is contrary to Jewish law.

Usury is an often discussed problem during the time of Jesus Christ, as Jesus twice drove the moneychangers out of the temple, because the moneychangers charged people interest when they exchanged their secular money for temple money with which they could buy sacrifices. Usury was forbidden in such cases, as **Deuteronomy 23:19-20** tells us:

19 “You shall not charge interest to your brother—interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest.

20 To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the LORD your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.

If the steward was charging the debtors interest and then rescinded the interest charges when he found out that he was about to lose his job, I can understand the master being pleased when the steward, who was breaking the law with the master’s money, reformed and started doing the correct thing. But **Luke 16:8** mentioned shrewdness on the part of the steward, which is defined as cleverness. Jesus continues, in **Luke 16:9**:

9 “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

Jesus tells us, in this verse, to use our unrighteous mammon, meaning our money, in such a way that when we die, God will be pleased with the way that we have used that which He has given us. **Psalm 24:1** informs us:

1 The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.

That which we have we have received from God, just as the steward received the money that he was managing from his master. God explains making friends with money in **1 Timothy 6:17-19**:

17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,

19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

The job of the steward is not to build God’s fortune to the largest amount that he can, but to manage God’s fortune in such a way as to do the most good that he can. Remember that the whole earth belongs to the Lord because He created it back in Genesis. God will never run out of resources, so He is not stockpiling them, but gifting us with them so that we can be an extension of Him. Stockpiling riches will do us no good, as we are only stewards, and we should recognize that it is more important to please the master than to build up our wealth.

We can be relieved of our stewardship, meaning our wealth, at any time, and we will certainly be relieved of our stewardship at some time, at which time we will have to give an account to God as to how we handled that which we gave us.

So, Jesus made the point that the most important thing is not making money, but rather handling our stewardship of money in such a way as to benefit the most people. But Jesus' point fell on deaf ears, as **Luke 16:14** tells us:

14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided [Jesus].

Since the Pharisees believed that they should make the most money that they could, they laughed at Jesus' teaching because it seemed ridiculous to them. In their opinion, any master that was pleased to get less money from his steward than he could must have had a screw loose. Jesus responded to them, in **Luke 16:15**:

15 And [Jesus] said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

The phrase "justify yourselves before men" means that they look to the carnal thinking of man to determine right and wrong, intelligent and ignorant.

Carnal thinking discounts the spiritual dimension.

Carnal thinking is focused on earthly realities, rather than heavenly ones.

Carnal thinking is decision making that only considers the reality of life on earth, disregarding the reality of death that moves us from life on earth to everlasting life with God in Heaven, or in hell.

Carnal people function as though they were going to live on the earth forever.

The Pharisees showed their carnality by being lovers of money. Money is a means of exchange on earth, but the money and possessions that you amass on earth cannot follow you to heaven. What actually follows you to heaven is the history of your use of the money over which God made you steward, not the actual money itself. And God tells us, in **1 Timothy 6:10**:

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The love of money is not the only thing that can lead us into evil.

Anything in this life has the potential to lead us into evil if we have a carnal perspective. Something as innocuous as eating fruit led the original man and woman into evil, because they disregarded God's perspective on eating. Anything on earth, regardless of how much potential good for which it can be used, has the potential to be sinful if we take a carnal perspective concerning our use of it and ignore God's perspective. By the same token, anything can be used for good, regardless of how evilly other people handle it, if we use it in keeping with God's perspective.

Marie and I have taken up ballroom dancing and now we go to parties and balls to increase the intimacy of our marital relationship by practicing a mutually enjoyable skill with one another, and incidentally, we demonstrate the beauty of our marital love for one another to those who see us. Others go to the same parties and balls to get drunk and find partners for adultery and fornication. What you do depends on your perspective. Paul tells us, in **1 Corinthians 6:12**

12 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

The difference between a spiritual and a carnal person is that the carnal person is under the power of the things of this world.

An alcoholic is under the power of liquor.

A drug addict is under the power of narcotics.

A glutton is under the power of food.

The steward in the parable was under the power of money.

But the interesting and encouraging thing is that although we may be under the power of the things of the world, we have access to another source of power that will allow us to regain control over ourselves. The steward was under the control of money, but when the master changed his circumstances, the steward took personal control over the power of money and become the master of it.

The power of the master working in our lives changes things. **1John 4:4** tells us:
4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

We do, though the power of God, have the ability to deal with our personal problems. A woman called a trainer to receive advice about her weight problem. “It doesn’t seem to matter what I do”, the woman began, “I just can’t seem to lose weight. I have a diet program to follow and exercises to do, but I just feel incapable of sticking to the weight loss regimen. I need something to give me some willpower, because I feel that I just don’t have control over myself.”

“Well”, the trainer began, “you have as much control over yourself as anyone else. Your problem is that you just refuse to suffer.”

“That’s not really true”, the woman replied, “I suffer with the symptoms of being overweight every single day.”

“You don’t suffer with the symptoms of being overweight”, the trainer continued, “you choose the symptoms of being overweight. If you chose to suffer, when it came time to eat, you would suffer the feelings of deprivation that you get from sticking to your regimen, and when it came time to exercise, you would suffer with the physical discomfort of moving all that extra weight enough to work some of it off. Every day, you have to make a conscious choice to either suffer productively to lose weight, or to avoid the suffering and keep the weight on.”

“Well”, responded the woman, “you don’t understand what it feels like to have to carry around all this extra weight. If you did, you wouldn’t say that I’m not suffering.”

“Well”, retorted the trainer, “I do understand the physiology of the body, and it is pretty much the same for everyone. If you put less fuel into the body than you use in a day, there is no way that you can avoid losing weight. It is simply a physical function. Eating adds weight, moving takes weight away. If you eat less and move more, you will lose weight. We know this is true, because prisoners in World War II concentration camps ate less and moved more, and there were no fat prisoners in the concentration camps.

But, when the time comes to make a decision about food, your preference is to eat more. You choose to eat more because of the positive feeling that you receive when you eat. You’re not suffering; you’re indulging in a positive feeling. When the time comes to exercise, you choose to move less because of the positive feeling that you receive by relaxing and being sedentary.

You're not suffering; you're indulging in a positive feeling. So, you're choosing not to suffer at dinnertime and exercise time. You may suffer the effects of the choice that you made later on, but at the time that you are making the choice your choice is to not suffer. If you choose to suffer, you'll lose weight, because losing weight is just a simple matter of physics. No one has control over that choice but you."

"When I was young", said the woman, "my mother gave us food to reward us and withheld food from us to punish us. Food means love to me. I have developed a mental block about food, and now, I can't control it."

"That is not true", said the trainer. "I'm sure that you understand the difference between then and now. What happened to you in your past may explain why you feel a certain way, and it may be that you have a conditioned response to eating, but regardless of how conditioned that you are, you still have conscious control over your conditioned response.

Your automatic response to food is like the cruise control on a car. Cruise control maintains the speed of the car at a certain level, however, at any time, the driver of the car can step on the accelerator and speed the car up, or he can step on the brake and slow the car down, which will turn the cruise control off. It takes conscious effort, but the driver can do it. In the same way, for you to react to food differently than your automatic response dictates will take conscious effort, but you can do it. Of course, overriding your conditioned response will cause you to suffer, because you will have to stay conscious of your automatic response and intentionally frustrate it, and you will probably find that emotionally difficult. But, as I said, you have to choose to suffer in order to achieve your objective."

This particular scenario is about weight loss, but the philosophical points that the trainer made apply to anything carnal that we do.

In order to move from the carnal to the spiritual; in order to obey God rather than men, we have to choose suffering. Jesus said it a bit differently, in **Matthew 16:24-27**

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

The denial of self leads to mental suffering. Self wants to do what self wants to do. For example, some students, born in our country and citizens of it, learned English as children and grew up speaking it. Some of these students decide that their academic classes are too hard for them. To do well in class, they would have give up more leisure time than they want to. These students choose not to suffer, but rather to have fun.

Some students come to our schools from other countries, and don't know the English language well. But, those foreign students consider their language deficiencies as obstacles to be climbed and conquered. They decide to do well in class, suffering the hard work, the lack of leisure, and the lack of indulgence to reap the benefits down the road.

There is an ultimate reward if we deny ourselves.

The carnal mind says, "Enjoy yourself today. Tomorrow may never come."

The spiritual mind says, "God is in control. Tomorrow is coming. Discipline yourself today, and you can enjoy yourself tomorrow."

Jesus told the lovers of money, who took no thought past their acquisition of it, in **Luke 16:15**:

15 And [Jesus] said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before [carnal] men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among [carnal] men is an abomination in the sight of God."

The real difference between maturity and immaturity is being able to see down the road, plan for the future, to choose to suffer in this life to receive the rewards in our everlasting life. In the next parable that Jesus tells to these lovers of money, Jesus spotlights the beggar Lazarus, who, begged at the gate of a rich man. The rich man, rather than sharing with Lazarus, sent his dog out to lick to Lazarus' sores. **Luke 16:22-23** records:

22 So it was that [Lazarus] the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.

23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

The rich man had the blessings of his earthly life, but he died and went to hell. Lazarus suffered through his earthly life, but at the end of his earthly suffering, he was carried to heaven. **Luke 16:24** continues:

24 "Then [the rich man] cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'

The rich man wanted Lazarus to come and minister to him, but you may remember that during their earthly lives, the rich man did not minister to Lazarus, but rather sent his dog out to lick Lazarus' sores. **Luke 16:25** spotlights this fact, as it says:

25 But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.'

Does this mean that all poor people are going to heaven and all rich people are going to hell? Jesus tells us, in **Matthew 19:23-24**:

23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

24 And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Riches are a challenge. Having them has the tendency to change our perspective from the things of God to the things of men. The Pharisees, who were rich, thought that Jesus' preaching was ridiculous, because Jesus taught that the acquisition of possessions was not the most important thing. Even the disciples, who were independent businessmen and well enough off that they could afford to leave their jobs and follow Jesus, had a tough time with Jesus' teaching. In **Matthew 19:25**:

25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus tells them, and us, that in order to be saved, we have to maintain a spiritual

perspective rather than a carnal one. The amount of money that you have may indicate your perspective on God, but the amount of money that you have does not determine your perspective on God.

Rich or poor, you need the correct perspective on God. **Matthew 19:26-30** records:

26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

27 Then Peter answered and said to [Jesus], “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?”

28 So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.

30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

The rich man, although he was in hell, was not totally calloused. He was concerned about his family, as **Luke 16:27-28** records:

27 “Then [the rich man] said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send [Lazarus] to my father’s house,

28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’

Although the rich man was not totally calloused, he was pretty calloused, because he wanted to send Lazarus, of whom he and his five brothers made sport in life, back to save them. Abraham gave the rich man the alternative, in **Luke 16:29**:

29 Abraham said to [the rich man], ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’

When Abraham speaks of “Moses and the prophets”, he is referring to the Old Testament Scripture. Abraham is telling the rich man that the warning that his brothers need to heed is in the Bible, and they should read their Bibles to change their perspectives. But the rich man argues, in **Luke 16:30**:

30 And [the rich man] said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’

But, the fact of the matter is that the Word of God is true because God said it, and if you doubt that which God tells you, why would you believe that which anyone else tells you? The fact is that there is no lack of evidence for the truth of the Bible; the real reason that people don’t believe in the truth of the Bible is that they are carnal, and that they do not want to do the suffering involved in following God’s commandments and becoming spiritual.

It’s the same reason that I was fat for most of my adult life and that I could still afford to lose some more weight, it’s the same reason that children fail in school, it’s the same self-indulgent reason that our economy is in the sad shape that it is in today. The fact is that we are not put on this earth to indulge ourselves, but we are put on this earth to do the will of God. Children may enjoy recess and lunch hour more than any other part of school, and although they need both of these breaks from class, we don’t send them to school to take breaks. I enjoy eating cheeseburgers, Doritos and ice cream, and getting my exercise by watching the football game,

but those are not the activities that are going to help me accomplish my weight loss goals. And I don't need else anyone to tell me; I already know that there were no fat people in concentration camps.

The fact of the matter is that we don't need someone to come from the dead to tell us about God. We don't need demonstration, we need discipline. We need to stop laughing at that which Jesus has already told us and start doing that which Jesus tells us to do. We need to take advantage of the opportunities that Jesus gives us to discipline ourselves rather than the opportunities that the evil one gives us to indulge ourselves. The devil has been tempting us to indulge ourselves since the Garden. It's time for us to stop listening.

No, Lazarus is not coming back from the dead to warn anyone. **Luke 16:31** concludes: **31 But [Abraham] said to [the rich man], 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'** ”

The job of every Christian is to make the difficult, conscious decision to become spiritual rather than carnal, which simply means; do not justify disobedience to God's commandments to yourself, but rather follow God's commandments. Jesus sacrificed Himself on the Cross of Calvary to pay the penalty that we owe for the sins that we have committed, and it would be intelligent of us to honor His sacrifice by recognizing the warning about our sinfulness that He has already given us, and to discipline ourselves to suffer rather than being self-indulgent, and to allow ourselves to be uncomfortable in order to do the Will of God. Giving up our sins and our self-indulgence is a simply a matter of discipline and devotion, so let us acknowledge our sinfulness, find our flaws, and make the conscious decision to live for the Lord, who told us, in **Matthew 16:24**:

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

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