

Chapter 18: The Rich Man

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 - Luke 12:13-21; 14:16-24; 16:1-13
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1. Introduction

Jesus' encounter with the rich young man (Mark 10:17-22) and His observation of the contribution of the Poor Widow at the temple (Mark 12:41-44) are separate events in the lives of real people that are recorded in the scriptures. The acquiring of money and how it is used plays an important part in the lives of most people. The gaining of money is an essential requirement in order to provide for the necessities of their lives. How we use the money we have can either be a stumbling block or a stepping stone in our journey toward eternal life. These two individuals, the rich man and the poor widow, are representatives in the extreme regarding their monetary means as noted by the identifying words, "rich" and "poor". They will also become important participants in lessons Jesus would teach us regarding our use of money.

We will first address the issues of marriage and Jesus' relationship with little children. Next, we will address the rich man and the poor widow, followed by three more of Jesus' parables. They include: the Rich Fool; the Great Supper, and the Unjust Steward.

2. Marriage

Matthew 19:3-11

3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

10 His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.

11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.

Matthew 19:5, similar to Genesis 2:24, makes it clear marriage is a special relationship between a man and a wife. The marriage covenant was based upon complete fidelity and commitment by both partners as noted for the man “shall cleave to” meaning “to stick fast to,” and “they twain shall become one flesh.” The marriage relationship, as it was understood in the beginning, was not to be for this life only, but beyond. Initially, divorce was not a consideration, as “from the beginning it was not so,” however, due to the hardness of the hearts of the children of Israel, divorce was allowed.

Dallin H. Oaks states,

“We live in a world in which the whole concept of marriage is in peril and where divorce is common place... The kind of marriage required for exaltation---eternal in duration and godlike in quality [the marriage of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden]---does not contemplate divorce. In the temples of the Lord, couples are married for all eternity. But some marriages do not progress toward that ideal... The Lord does not currently enforce the consequences of the celestial standard. He permits divorced persons to marry again without the stain of immorality specified in the higher law [Matthew 5:31-32].”¹

3. Jesus’ Relationship with Little Children

Matthew 19:13-15

13 ¶ Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

15 And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

While we do not know the reason why the disciples sent the children away, we prefer to assume that it was in response to the fatigue that Jesus was experiencing. Whatever the reason, once Jesus became aware of His disciples’ actions, He requested the children be invited to come to Him. Still addressing His disciples, Jesus made it clear the attributes found in innocent children are illustrative of those who also make up the kingdom of heaven. These qualities would include: teachable, trusting, pure of heart, forgiving, and loving.

In the Book of Mormon, we read of Jesus appearing to those who had gathered to hear His words of counsel and direction. During one occasion, after healing “those who were afflicted in any way,” (B/M, 3 Nephi 17:9), He commanded “that their little children should be brought...and [He] set them down upon the ground round about him...’ (B/M, 3 Nephi 17:11-12).

Jesus, at this time, offered a prayer to His Father, on their behalf.

B/M, 3 Nephi 17:15-17

15 ...behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him.

16 And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father;

17 And no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father.

Neither when He blessed them as recorded in Matthew or in the Book of Mormon when He prayed on behalf of the children who were gathered, do we learn the words He spoke. One thing we may be sure is the love Jesus has for the children is beyond words to express. On another occasion, He did express the importance of our being like a little child in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, as well as the penalty for abusing or causing a little child to stumble in faith or their well-being.

Matthew 18:2-6

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

4. Two Extremes: The Rich Young Man and the Poor Widow

4.1. The Rich Young Man

We begin our attention with Jesus' encounter with the rich young man recorded by three of the gospel writers, Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-27, Luke 18:18-27, and the Joseph Smith Translation. While in many respects the accounts are similar, we will focus our attention on the scripture that offers the greatest insight.

We will start with Mark's account for it provides insight as to the attitude of the Rich Young Man.

Mark 10:17

17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

The phrases, "came...running and kneeled to him" suggest the young man was extremely anxious to receive an answer to his question as well as being humble regarding his reference to Jesus. He referred to Jesus as "Good Master" which prompts Jesus to remind the young man that "None is good but one, that is God" (Mark 10:18).

James E. Talmage states,

“... there is none good but one, that is, God” [infers]...no denial of sinlessness on the Savior’s part; the young man had called him ‘good’ by way of polite compliment rather than in recognition of His Godship, and Jesus declined to acknowledge the distinction when applied in that sense.”²

Jesus now responded,

Matthew 19:17-18

**17 ...but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.
18 He saith unto him, Which? ...**

The inference to his question is there must be one commandment that is more important than all the others. It is that commandment he desires to emphasize.

Matthew 19:18-19

**18 ...Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal,
Thou shalt not bear false witness,
19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.**

We may not assume because Jesus lists only four of the Ten Commandments and adds another, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” that somehow the others are not important. Mark records his response to the Rich Man’s question as “Thou knowest the commandments” (Mark 10:19). The inference is I need not list each one of them for you. You know them. The young man then responded to Jesus.

Mark 10:20

20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

It is apparent from the young man’s response he has been one of the faithful in Israel. He states that he has been obedient in keeping “all” the commandments. If so, he was certainly among those young men living in Israel who had been diligent in living a life of obedience in spite of his riches.

Mark 10:21 (underline added)

21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

While we are not justified in assuming Jesus was extending a call to the apostleship, though similar words had previously been used. It was surely a call to discipleship. This is confirmed by the phrase, “take up the cross, and follow me.”

Robert L. Millet states,

“There is a sense in which we as disciples take up our cross by applying the atoning blood of Christ, by repenting and coming unto him. Thus, the death of the natural man is followed by the birth of the spiritual man and the rise to a newness of life...We take up our cross as we seek to put down our sins and thereby enter the realm of divine experience...In some ways, the call to discipleship is also a call to suffer. It is a call to bear

with the trials of this life and particularly the indifference or rejection of those who despise the way of holiness. To go where Christ has gone, we must be willing—at least in part—to bear what he has borne. To inherit celestial glory, we must be willing to face the refining fires of suffering.”³

Matthew 16:24	JST, Matthew 16:25-26
24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.	25 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. 26 <u>And now for a man to take up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments.</u>

Matthew 19:22

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

The young man declined the opportunity to become one of Jesus’ disciples as his heart was yet set upon the riches of the world rather than the treasures of eternal life. He was obedient to the commandments, but his heart remained set upon the material things of the world. Part of his preparation in becoming a disciple meant his heart would have to be broken so he would be more receptive to the things of the spirit. This could only be accomplished if he were willing to first give up the riches and worldly treasures that were so important to him. This was the “one thing” that was keeping him from membership in the kingdom of God on earth and his journey toward eternal life.

Mark 10:23-25

**23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!
24 And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God.
25 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!**

James E. Talmage states,

“It has been asserted that the term “needle’s eye” was applied to a small door or wicket set in or alongside the great gates in the wall of cities; and the assumption has been raised that Jesus had such a wicket in mind when he spoke of the seeming impossibility of a camel passing through a needle’s eye. It would be possible, though very difficult for a camel to squeeze its way through the little gate, and it could in no wise do so except when relieved of its load and stripped of all its harness. If this conception be correct, we may find additional similitude between the fact that the camel must first be unloaded and stripped, however costly its burden or rich its accoutrement; and the necessity of the rich young ruler, and so of any man, divesting himself of the burden and trappings of wealth, if he would enter by the narrow way that leadeth into the kingdom.”⁴

Mark 10:26-27	JST, Mark 10:25-26
26 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?	25 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?

<p>27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.</p>	<p>26 And Jesus, looking upon them, said, With men that trust in riches, it is impossible; but not <u>impossible with men who trust in God and leave all for my sake, for with such all these things are possible.</u></p>
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It is important we not conclude only those who are poor as to the things of this earth will be able to enter into the kingdom of God, while the rich will be excluded. It is not the possession of riches, but the worship of riches that precludes the individual from being receptive to the whisperings of the spirit and the call to discipleship.

King Benjamin, a Prophet/King who lived upon the America’s gave this important advice to both the rich and the poor regarding the use of their temporal riches.

B/M, Mosiah 4:26, 24 (verses reversed for emphasis)

26 ...for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye [the rich] may walk guiltless before God--I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants.

24 ...I say unto the poor, ye who have not, and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet state,

“...what the Lord means in regard to prosperity [and riches]: we are prospered when we enjoy his Spirit and feel his presence.”⁵

It is my hope the Rich man continued to give thought to his experience with the Savior, came to his senses, unburdened himself, and returned to begin his journey to eternal life.

4.2. The Poor Widow

This event is listed in the Harmony of the Gospels in the LDS Bible Dictionary as “Widow’s mite.”⁶

This event is recorded in both Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4. J. Reuben Clark states in his list of recorded events in the Savior’s life and works on earth, chronologically arranged, that this event occurred during the last week of his Atoning Sacrifice and Ascension. (see *Our Lord of the Gospels*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954, [Fourth Printing, 1974], 4, 15).

Mark 12:41

41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

Peloubet's Bible Dictionary states,

“Treasury. Mark 12:41; Luke 21:1, a name given by the rabbins to thirteen chests in the temple, called trumpets from their shape. They stood in the court of the women. It would seem probable that this court was sometimes itself called “the treasury” because it contained these repositories.”⁷

Jesus is at the temple observing the people as they put their money into the temple treasury. Of all those who are present, the actions of one in particular captures His attention.

Mark 12:42

42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

Peloubet's Bible Dictionary states,

“Mite. a coin current in Palestine in the time of our Lord. Mark 12:41-42; Luke 21:1-4. It seems in Palestine to have been the smallest piece of money (worth about one-eighth of a cent), being the half of the farthing. From St. Mark's explanation, “two mites, which make a farthing,” [Mark 12:42], it may perhaps be inferred that the farthing was the commoner coin.”⁸

According to Peloubet, the amount she deposited would be equal to one-fourth of a cent. This amount is in contrast to “many that were rich who cast in much” (Mark 12:41).

Mark 12:43

43 And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

At this moment, the attention of His disciples must have been riveted on His words. They must have thought to themselves, “How is it possible that one who appears to be so poor in her appearance cast into the temple treasury an amount that is greater than all others? We have seen the rich who have cast large amounts of money into the treasury. How much did she cast in? How did we miss her offering?” Jesus offers further clarification, knowing the thoughts of His disciples.

Mark 12:44

44 For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“Out of their surplus, without sacrifice, often with selfish motives, frequently amid the blare of trumpets, rich men are sometimes wont to give to worthy causes. Meanwhile, the poor, out of their penury, unknown to their fellowmen, but because their hearts are right, sometimes give unheralded ‘mites’ to like worthy causes.

“[Drawing upon] this episode in Jewish life...Jesus...teaches that the giver is greater than the gift; that sacrifice of all, though such be small in amount, is greater than the largess of kings who neither miss nor need that which they give away; and that it is the intent of the heart, not the value of the gift, which count on the eternal ledgers.”⁹

It is not the amount, but the attitude that we have as we share our means to care and lift others. If we have, it is important we share. If not, we should always express gratitude for what we have and vow when we have, we too will be generous.

We have focused during this section upon money and our attitude regarding sharing with others. I believe it is important that we not forget the words of Jesus to the rich young man, "One thing thou lackest!" (Mark 10:21). For the young man, it was his focus on material possessions. It may be something else were the Savior to see into our souls and then share with us the "one thing" that is keeping us from full discipleship in his kingdom. It is a question that would be important for each of us to consider and then address.

5. The Meaning and Frequency of Parables

Before we embark upon a further understanding of the following three parables Jesus taught, let us review the definition of a parable by James E. Talmage.

James E. Talmage states,

"A parable is a brief narrative or descriptive allegory [the setting forth of a subject under the guise of some other subject or aptly suggestive likeness] founded on real scenes or events such as occur in nature and human life, and usually with a moral or religious application."¹⁰

Simply stated, a parable is a teaching aid designed to convey spiritual truth to those who are spiritually receptive while not adding condemnation to those who are spiritually ignorant. Interpretation of the parable is at all times subject to the individual's receptivity to the spirit.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"We have no doubt that Jesus gave all of the parables many times. It strains the bands of sense and reason to suppose that each of his wise sayings was spoken only once. He came to preach the gospel and to save sinners, and the same message saves all men in all situations. If there were Galileans near Capernaum who were entitled to hear the Sermon on the Mount, sure there were Judeans near Jerusalem to whom the same words should be spoken."¹¹

6. The Parable of the Rich Fool

This parable has only a singular reference in the gospels and is found only in Luke. It was prompted by a request from a member in the company, possibly one of His disciples.

Luke 12:13-14

13 And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.

14 And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

Jesus' ministry is not about acting as judge over temporal affairs. He has come as the Savior of the world and the Messiah. He also serves, to those who will listen, as a Master Teacher of the principles and processes which will bring about a change in an individual's life and qualify him as a candidate for eternal life.

Luke 12:15

15 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

From Jesus' response to the inquiry, it would appear the fundamental issue between the man and his brother is regarding covetousness. The man making the inquiry seems to have an overriding desire to obtain an abundance of worldly riches, far greater than his needs.

Luke 12:16-19

16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a rich man brought forth plentifully:

17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

The rich man or rich fool, expresses no gratitude to God for the success of his harvest. It is "as if" he is so centered upon himself he is unaware the success he enjoys is due to heavenly blessings, not the result of his sole effort. When the abundance of his harvest is greater than his capacity to store the increase, he does not consider sharing with others who may be in need. His only solution is to build larger barns to store his surplus. Because of his abundance, his thought again is only on himself and the pleasurable lifestyle he can enjoy.

Luke 12:20-21

20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

While this man may not be a member of the "Me generation," he certainly exhibits all the characteristics. His singular effort for obtaining worldly goods was for his own temporal benefit and no one else! As he departs this mortal life, he can take none of his worldly possessions with him. He has spent his life in gaining that which is of no worth beyond this world.

James E. Talmage states,

"His sin was twofold; first, he regarded his great store chiefly as the means of securing personal ease and sensuous indulgence; secondly, in his material prosperity he failed to acknowledge God, and even counted the years as his own...He had used his time and his powers of body and mind to sow, reap and garner—all for himself."¹²

Jesus observed that besides his focus upon laying "up treasure for himself," he is also "not rich toward God. We might ask, "How do we become rich toward God?"

The New Testament, Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Supplement states,

"...[We become rich or lay up treasures in heaven] by consecrating what we have and are to building God's kingdom. Tithes and fast offerings are a beginning. We must learn to treat *our* goods as a temporary stewardship to be used for others as well as for ourselves."¹³

Jesus concludes with this important observation.

Luke 12:31, 34

31 ...seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Melvin R. Brooks titled this parable as,

"The Rich Fool—Counterfeit Security. [This man's] heart was so affixed [and] concentrated upon the material that he overlooked his spiritual development."¹⁴

7. The Parable of the Great Supper

This parable is recorded only in Luke. It is found in Luke 14:16-24.

The location of this parable is the house of one of the chief Pharisees with whom Jesus has gone to eat bread on the Sabbath day (see Luke 14:1). He will share two parables with them--the wedding guests (Luke 14:7-11) and the great supper (Luke 14:16-24).

Luke 14:16-20

16 Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:

17 And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

18 And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.

19 And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

20 And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

As Jesus begins His parable, one cannot help noticing the explanations that are offered in order for the invitee to be excused from attending the supper. Each of the reasons offered would be considered without substance or validity. Property can be seen another day as can the training of oxen. Likewise, the new bride can accompany her husband without inconvenience.

Luke 14:21

21 So that servant came, and shewed [told] his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

The host of the supper was annoyed regarding the excuses that were offered by those who were to be his guests. His guests had chosen to be elsewhere rather than attending the supper at his home. The host

determined the preparation he made shall not be in vain. He will instead invite those in the community who are disadvantaged whether by income or physical limitations. One has the impression this is a very different group of guests from those who were originally invited.

Luke 14:22-23

22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

Following the seating of the group from the city who have limitations, the master expanded the area from which his guests are to be invited. He told his servant to compel those who are reluctant to attend. This he does out of his own need to have his house filled.

Luke 14:24

24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

This statement appears to refer to the original group who were invited who offered the invalid excuses.

James E. Talmage states,

"...The covenant people, Israel, were the specially invited guests. They had been bidden [invited] long enough aforetime, and by their own profession [covenant] as the Lord's own had agreed to be partakers of the feast. When all was ready, on the appointed day, they were severally [individually] summoned by the Messenger who had been sent by the Father; he was even then in their midst. But the cares of riches, the allurements of material things, and the pleasures of social and domestic life had engrossed them; and they prayed to be excused or irreverently declared they could not or would not come. Then the gladsome invitation was to be carried to the Gentiles, who were looked upon as spiritually poor, maimed, halt, and blind. And later, even the pagans beyond the walls, strangers in the gates of the holy city, would be bidden to the supper. These, surprised at the unexpected summons, would hesitate, until by gentle urging and effective assurance that they were really included among the bidden guests, they would feel themselves constrained or compelled to come. The possibility of some of the discourteous ones arriving later, after they had attended to their more absorbing affairs, is indicated in the Lord's closing words: 'For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.'"¹⁵

F. Melvin Hammond states,

"We often must make significant changes in our lives in order to attend the feast at the table of the Lord. Too many of us put those changes off, thinking there is no urgency. Perhaps this parable could be called the 'don't bother me now, Lord' parable. We try to excuse ourselves in various ways. Each rationalization comes from selfishness and almost always related to something temporal. For some it is the Word of Wisdom. For others it is the law of tithing. Perhaps it is a reluctance to live the law of chastity. Whatever the reason, we who reject or delay our response to the Savior's invitation show a lack of love for Him who is our King.

"Some who have accepted the gospel by being baptized do not continue to enjoy the feast. Once we have come to the Lord's table, let us not leave too early!"¹⁶

8. The Parable of the Unjust Steward

This parable is recorded only by Luke. It is found in Luke 16:1-13.

The LDS Bible Dictionary gives the location for this parable as Perea (see Parable: The Unjust Steward. LDS Bible Dictionary in *Holy Bible*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 691).

You will recall Jesus and His disciples went to Bethabara in Perea in response to the growing persecution and murderous opposition to His teachings by the Jewish religious leaders. He remained in comparative quiet, teaching the people and His disciples, prior to His returning to Jerusalem in response to the death of Lazarus and His own pending sacrifice.

Luke 16:1-2

1 And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

2 And he called him, and said unto him, How it is that I hear that of thee? give an account of thy stewardship: for thou mayest be no longer steward.

Jay A. and Donald W. Parry state,

“A steward is a manager or administrator over his master’s domestic or business affairs. He is not simply the head of the servants, but is a trained and trusted agent of his employer’s enterprises. He had authority (which his master has delegated to him) and is entrusted to make major decisions on behalf of his employer and to work with third parties, such as his master’s debtors. In this parable the steward works for ‘a certain rich man.’ That the man is wealthy is shown by the fact that he has sufficient money to employ a steward and that there are debtors who owe him a great amount of goods, including nine hundred gallons of oil and a hundred bushels of wheat [‘According to one biblical commentator (Nolland)...the oil involved would represent the annual yield of a very large olive grove...the wheat debt ‘would represent a half-share rent for almost 200 acres, which is perhaps twenty times the size of an average family plot’].”¹⁷

Whether the steward is guilty of embezzlement, overcharging for services rendered, or carelessness in record keeping is not given. The steward does, however, fear the loss of his job.

Luke 16:3

3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

As the steward, considered the loss of his employment, his future appeared bleak. His pride would not allow him to do manual labor and were he to do so any opportunity to become a steward again would be severely limited. Nor can he become a beggar who depends on the kindness of others in order to meet his basic needs.

Luke 16:4-7

4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

6 And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

In order to continue his positive relationship with his Lord's debtors, he determined to contact each of them and to reduce the amount owed on their bill.

Jay A. and Donald W. Parry state,

"By reducing the amount owed to his employer, the steward was demonstrating a spirit of generosity to the debtors and at the same time gaining support for possible future employment in an occupation similar to his office as steward."¹⁸

Luke 16:8-9

8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of the light.

9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"By his master the dishonest servant is commended, not for his malfeasance in office, but for the effective way in which he made provision for his own future. Then Jesus draws this conclusion: *The children of this world* (worldly people) *are in their generation* (in the time and season of their deceitful and carnal dealings with other worldly people) *wiser* (exhibit greater prudence and foresight, as pertaining to temporal things) *than the children of light* (those who have received the gospel, as pertaining to spiritual things)."¹⁹

The unjust steward was concerned about his future employment. He devised a plan that would enable him to remain in the good graces of his Lord's current debtors and maybe in the future afford him possible employment. Should we not be as concerned about our spiritual growth as he was regarding his temporal employment?

If we are not attentive to our spiritual growth and development, we will find the weeds of transgression have made their way into our beautiful garden. Continued inattention to matters of the spirit, for example daily prayers or scripture reading or service to others, will result in the multiplication of our few weeds and they will then overcome our beautiful garden. Like the unjust steward, we too must become actively engaged in pursuing a course that will continue to restore our employment/garden to its original glory. If we fail to act, we will receive a glory that we would not have considered desirable when we made our original commitment.

James E. Talmage states,

"Our Lord's purpose was to show the contrast between the care, thoughtfulness, and devotion of men engaged in the money-making affairs of earth, and the half-hearted ways of many who are professedly striving after spiritual riches...If the wicked steward, when cast out from his master's house because of unworthiness, might hope to be received into the homes of those whom he had favored, how much more confidently may they who are genuinely devoted to the right hope be received into the everlasting mansions of God!...Take a lesson from even the dishonest and the evil; if they are so prudent as to provide for the only future they think of, how much more should you, who believe in an eternal future, provide therefore!...Emulate the unjust steward...in their zeal, forethought, and provision for the future."²⁰

Following the sharing of the parable of the Unjust Steward, Jesus addressed the importance of the disciples being faithful to their values.

Luke 16:10-13

10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

11 If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

13 No servant can serve two masters: for either you will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Jesus seems to be telling us that when we are trustworthy regarding little things, we will continue to be honorable when it comes to greater things. We will continue to hold firm to our standard of honesty regardless of the amount involved. If we are not trustworthy in little things, we will not be honest when it comes to more serious matters. The Lord has only one standard. It is to be honest in all our dealings, with all people, and at all times. If we are not honest in our dealings with others, the danger is that we will lose the ability to trust others to be honest with us?

The story is told regarding a conversation two friends had regarding being honest. One said that he would always be honest. His friend decided to test him. He then said, "Would you be honest for five dollars? The other said, "Yes, "I would be honest if it involved five dollars." His friend said, "Would you be honest for five hundred dollars?" Again, the reply was, "Yes, "I would be honest if it involved five hundred dollars." Then his friend asked his last question, "Would you be honest if the transaction involved five thousand dollars? The reply was, "I would have to think about it first." His friend replied, "Then you are not truly honest." When we have to revisit our ethics each time a choice arises, then we still harbor doubts regarding our values. The individual who is truly honest has made their decision before the situation arises and does not need to give the matter further thought. The decision they made then stands throughout their life. The result is a truly honest person.

When we become involved in circumstantial ethics where the means justifies the end and each event is different, the road becomes very slippery. Before we realize it, we too have become dishonest. May Jesus' words continue to ring in our ears, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).

9. Conclusions

We have been spiritually fed and instructed by the scriptures. We began with the importance of the marriage relationship and our continued fidelity to each other. We also addressed Jesus' love for the little children. Next, we addressed the contrast between the rich young man and the widow. We are taught the importance of each of us to being generous with our means to others. We must remember it is not the amount we have that is important, but it is our willingness to share with others.

The parable of the Rich Fool reminds us all that we have comes from the Our Heavenly Father. We should always express gratitude for our blessings and recognize His kindness to us. When we are successful in our financial endeavors, it is important we do not hoard our riches for ourselves, but share them with others. Upon our returning to our heavenly home, we will be required to give an accounting to the Lord regarding how we used the resources He gave us during mortality. If we have not been prudent and generous with others, we will find ourselves lacking. It is an eternal truth that all the rich fool had accumulated during his lifetime had no value when converted to heavenly currency.

The parable of the Great Supper reminds us the gospel will go forth to those in the world and all will have an opportunity to partake of its blessings. If we fail to accept the invitation to participate, we will forfeit the blessings of joy and happiness that could have become ours.

Lastly, we turn our attention to the lessons learned from the parable of the Unjust Steward. Some have focused upon the ethics of the steward and thus do not completely understand the purpose for the parable.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"...this parable [is] an endorsement, not of dishonesty and perfidy, but of worldly sagacity and wisdom in caring for one's own interests."²¹

It is the steward's zeal in trying to provide for his temporal future that we as disciples of Christ should seek to emulate. We understand the importance of providing for the necessities of life in a temporal world, but it is more important that our commitment of time and effort be in keeping the commandments and building the kingdom of God on earth. It is important we are as "anxiously engaged" in serving our fellowmen as the steward was in spending his energy to secure his employment. This will best be accomplished, for him as well as for us, when we are not passive but energetic in the Lord's service. We are prepared "to go and to do" when the opportunities to serve arise. We are not standing on the sidelines passively observing, but are active participants.

Jesus reminds us that "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"Mammon is an Aramaic word for *riches*; as here used the connotation indicates *deceitful wealth*, wealth that is fleeting and will not endure in the eternal worlds."²²

As disciples, we must not be swayed from our devotion to the things of the spirit and building the kingdom of God on earth by the trappings of the world. We must never let the things that matter least take precedence in our lives over the things that matter most. If we do, someday we will be greatly disappointed.

Footnotes

¹ “Divorce,” in *Ensign*, May, 2007, 70.

² *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 476.

³ *An Eye Single to the Glory of God*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1991, 38-40.

⁴ *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 485-486.

⁵ *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol. 3. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991, [3rd Printing, 1993], 11.

⁶ “Harmony of the Gospels.” LDS Bible Dictionary. *Holy Bible*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 693.

⁷ **Treasury**. *Peloubet’s Bible Dictionary*. Philadelphia, Pa.: The John C. Winston Company, 1913, [1947], 706.

⁸ **Mite**. *Peloubet’s Bible Dictionary*. Philadelphia, Pa.: The John C. Winston Company, 1913, [1947], 413.

⁹ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [11th Printing, 1976], 627-628.

¹⁰ *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 304.

¹¹ *The Mortal Messiah: Book 3*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1980, 244.

¹² *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 439.

¹³ *The New Testament, Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Supplement*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982, 71.

¹⁴ *Parables of the Kingdom*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1965, 58.

¹⁵ *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 452.

¹⁶ “Parables of Jesus: The Great Supper,” *Ensign*, April 2003, 52; see also Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry. *Understanding the Parables of Jesus Christ*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2006, 142.

¹⁷ *Understanding the Parables of Jesus Christ*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2006, 144, 147.

¹⁸ *Understanding the Parables of Jesus Christ*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2006, 147.

¹⁹ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [11th Printing, 1976], 514.

²⁰ *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 463-464.

²¹ *The Mortal Messiah: Book 3*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1980, 256.

²² *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [11th Printing, 1976], 515.