

Exegetical Study on the Parable of the Unjust Steward

Chapter 4.8 – Verse 13: The Climactic Choice

“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon.” Verse 13 is the culmination of the parable’s teaching. After the narrative of the steward and the principles of stewardship, Jesus presses home the inescapable truth: wealth and God are rival masters. The saying functions as both summary and climax. It is not simply about wise use of money; it is about ultimate allegiance. Jesus frames the issue in the stark terms of slavery. In antiquity, a slave could not be the property of two masters at once. Exclusive loyalty was demanded. To imagine one slave serving two masters would be absurd, for their commands could not always align. Sooner or later, loyalty to one would mean disobedience to the other. By applying this metaphor to discipleship, Jesus makes the demand radical. Wealth is not just a possession; it is a power that demands devotion. God, likewise, demands exclusive loyalty. Neutrality is impossible. “Mammon” is an Aramaic word transliterated into Greek, personifying wealth. By using this term, Jesus suggests that money is not a passive tool but an active rival. Mammon functions like a deity, commanding trust, love, and obedience. In practice, people serve Mammon by pursuing security, status, and pleasure through wealth. The stark choice—God or Mammon—reveals that money is never morally neutral. One either uses it in service to God or is enslaved by it. This verse strips away illusions: divided loyalty is impossible. Jesus intensifies the contrast with emotional language: hate and love, devotion and despising. These are not mild preferences but total commitments. The heart cannot be divided at its deepest level of loyalty. Where wealth captures affection, God is sidelined. Where God is truly loved, wealth becomes a secondary tool rather than a master. For Luke’s audience, many of whom struggled with poverty and the temptations of wealth, this saying carried both warning and liberation. Warning: disciples must examine their hearts for signs of divided loyalty. Liberation: they need not fear Mammon’s hold, for God alone is worthy of trust. The verse also sets the stage for what follows in Luke 16, where the Pharisees—lovers of money—scoff at Jesus’ teaching. The contrast between God and Mammon explains their rejection: their devotion was already compromised. Verse 13 delivers the final blow. After showing that wealth is temporary (v. 9) and a test of faithfulness (vv. 10–12), Jesus confronts disciples with the decisive question of loyalty. Who will be served: God or Mammon? No one can serve both. The parable’s message ends not with clever strategy but with ultimate allegiance. The steward’s shrewdness may inspire, but the final call is absolute: disciples must choose their master. The parable concludes with a non-negotiable truth: money is not simply about management but about mastery. God and Mammon stand as rival claimants to human loyalty, and only one can be served. The wise disciple chooses God, using wealth in service of the kingdom, never allowing it to rule.