

FAITHFUL AND UNFAITHFUL STEWARDS

THAT AWAITING BOTH FAITHFUL AND UNFAITHFUL CHRISTIANS

By Arlen L. Chirwood

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 fellowser-vants, 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 (Matt. 24:45-51).

The parable of the Householder and His servant refers to *stewardship in the house during the*

time of the Lord's absence, with the coming kingdom in view. This stewardship involves carrying out the Householder's wishes relative to affairs in the house. The Householder has spoken, and the stewards are to act accordingly during the time of His absence. So far as activities in the house are concerned, *the only thing of any moment is that which the Householder has commanded should be carried out by His household stewards during His time of absence.*

The one requirement of stewards is "faithfulness" (1 Cor. 4:2). The Householder has left instructions, and every steward in the house is to exercise faithfulness therein, with faithfulness centered in following the instructions left by the Householder prior to His departure.

The parable of the Householder and His servant shows the command given to a steward by the Householder and the end result of both faithfulness and unfaithfulness by the steward to this command. Faithfulness will result in the steward being *rewarded*, and unfaithfulness will result in the steward being *severely chastened*.

Something often overlooked in the parable of the Householder and His servant is the fact that *there is only one servant in view throughout the parable.* This was made clear by the Lord when He gave the same parable on an earlier occasion, as recorded in Luke 12:42-48. He first spoke of a *faithful and wise servant* (vv. 42-44); then He spoke of *the same servant becoming unfaithful* (vv. 45-48):

"And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward [Gk., *oikonomos*], 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.

But and if that servant say in his heart [the same servant, the previously mentioned steward], 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 [‘the unfaithful ones’]” (vv. 42-46).

The only difference in the wording of the text in the two accounts is the use of the word “evil” before “servant” in Matthew’s account. In Luke, the text reads, “But and if that servant...” (v. 45); in Matthew, the text reads, “But and if that evil servant...” (v. 48). The servant in both accounts actually *became an evil servant*, though the word itself is not used in Luke. Comparing the accounts, both should be understood in the sense of,

“But if that steward, becoming an evil steward, shall...” or “But if that steward should wickedly say...”

The servant thus, in both accounts of the parable, *either exercises faithfulness or he becomes unfaithful.* In Matt. 24:45-47 and Luke 12:42-44, *the servant remains faithful* to the charge left by the Householder, resulting in his being *rewarded* at the time of the Householder’s return. In Matt. 24:48-51 and Luke 12:45-48, *the same servant becomes unfaithful* and begins acting in a manner completely contrary to the charge left by the Householder, resulting in his being *severely chastened* at the time of the Householder’s return.

Command of the Householder

The Householder's command to the servant placed over His house was *to give those in the house "meat in due season"* (v. 45). "Meat" in Scripture, as distinguished from "milk," has a peculiar reference to those things pertaining *to the Lord's return and the coming kingdom*.

"Meat," for example, in Heb. 5:11-14 has to do with Christ exercising the Melchizedek priesthood, a ministry as both King and Priest, reserved for the coming age. In the parable of the Householder and His servant, this is shown *by everything in the parable revolving around the Lord's return, with either reward or chastisement — with the kingdom in view — awaiting the servants*.

The purpose for the entire present dispensation has to do with *the coming kingdom*. The call is presently going forth concerning proffered positions as co-heirs with Christ during the coming age, and the present dispensation covers that period of time when fruit relating to the kingdom will be brought forth by those destined to comprise the co-heirs. The "meat in due season," not only in the light of related Scripture but in the light of the text itself, would have to consist of those things relating to the Lord's return and the coming kingdom.

The faithful servant, dispensing "meat in due season," teaches those placed under his care about the Lord's return and proffered positions in the kingdom, in view of extracting fruit for his absent Lord. At the time of the Lord's return, fruit will be in evidence; and not only will the faithful servant be positioned as "ruler [co-heir with Christ in the kingdom]," but through his previous ministry in the house others will be brought into this position

as well.

Should the servant become unfaithful, the opposite will be true. He will not teach those placed under his care about the Lord's return and proffered positions in the kingdom. There will be no fruit; and not only will the unfaithful servant face severe chastisement, but those placed under his care, failing to bring forth fruit (as a direct result of the unfaithful servant's ministry), will find themselves in similar straits.

The servant in the parable who became unfaithful said in his heart, "My lord delayeth his coming." He then began to "smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken" (vv. 48, 49). The word translated "smite" in the Greek text refers to *a blow to the body*.

This is the word used in Matt. 27:30 and Luke 22:64 where Christ was smitten on the head and face preceding His crucifixion. The contextual usage of the word in Matt. 24:49 would actually seem to be something similar to what we understand today as a "slap in the face." The servant's refusal to give meat in due season would, in this sense, be a slap in the face for those placed under his care (for he, through his actions, completely disregards the reason for his appointed position, which has to do with the spiritual welfare of those whom he is mistreating).

And his eating and drinking with the drunken, contextually (*cf.* vv. 37-39), would refer to his manner of living becoming patterned after that of the world, completely oblivious to matters relating to the Lord's return and the coming kingdom.

Reward, Chastisement from the Householder

The reward awaiting the faithful servant is

to be positioned as "ruler" over all his Lord's goods. Those servants brought into this position are referred to elsewhere in Scripture as "joint-heirs" or "fellowheirs" (same word in the Greek text [*cf.* Rom. 8:17; Eph. 3:6]). These are the "many sons" whom Christ is in the process of bringing unto glory (Heb. 2:10) to exercise the rights of primogeniture during the coming age. These will be those bringing forth fruit during the present dispensation, with a view to their constituting the rulers in the heavenly sphere of the kingdom as co-heirs with Christ during the coming age.

Chastisement awaiting the unfaithful servant will, on the other hand though, be an entirely different matter. The text reads that the Lord, upon His return, "shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites ['unbelievers' (*lit.*, 'unfaithful') in Luke 12:46]" (Matt. 24:51).

The Greek word translated "shall cut [him] asunder" (*dichotomeo*) literally means to *cut in two*, a form of executing criminals in ancient times. The word is used in a metaphorical sense to describe *punishment of a severe nature*.

It is no small thing to disregard the clear instructions left by the Householder at the time of His departure, for, when He returns, household servants are going to be dealt with on the basis of their actions relative to these provided instructions.

And reward or chastisement will be exactly commensurate with the household servants' faithfulness or unfaithfulness in the matter.

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