

**II**

**THE UNJUST STEWARD**

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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.

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

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.

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

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

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

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.

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 light.

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.

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.

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

And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? ---*Luke 16: 1-12.*

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**II**

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I HAVE often said to you in my discourses, that there is one fictitious and false conception prevalent among men, which multiplies their transgressions, and diminishes the good which we ought, each of us, to do. And this false conception is, that all that we have to enjoy in this life we possess as lords and masters. And on account of this notion we do fiercely fight and war and contend for it and protect it to the uttermost as a precious possession. Now the truth of the matter is not so, but quite otherwise. For none of those things which we have received is our own, nor do we as absolute possessors and lords dwell in this life as in a house of our own; but <sup>148</sup> as sojourners, and strangers, and wanderers, and when we do not expect it, we are led whither we would not go. And when it seems good to the Lord we are deprived of the possession of our wealth. Wherefore the enjoyment of this perishable life is very liable to change. He who is to-day glorious, is to-morrow an object of pity, eliciting compassion and help. He who is now prosperous and flourishing in wealth, suddenly finds himself poor, without even bread to support life. In this

respect especially does our God surpass mortals, in that he is always the same, and in the same state, and possesses life and glory and power inalienable.

Why I have thus begun my discourse, is perhaps already perceived by those who are attentive and intelligent. Luke has fashioned us a parable that, by way of preface, was just now read to us, in which he <sup>149</sup> describes the steward of other men's goods as groaning and troubled, because, being luxurious and extravagant, he has heard from the master of the money and property, the words, "Give an account of thy stewardship and depart, for I will not suffer thee to revel in my possessions, as though they were thine own." Now this is not the narrative of a thing that really took place, but the fiction of a parable, which by obscure sayings inculcates moral virtue. Know then, that each one of you is an administrator of what belongs to another; cast off then the pride of authority, and put on the humility and prudence of a steward, accountable for his acts. Be always waiting for your Lord, to whom with fear you must render a strict account. For you are a sojourner who has received the privilege of only a temporary and fleeting use of the things in your possession. <sup>150</sup> And if you are in doubt about this, observe what happens, and be taught by experience, that trustworthy teacher.

You possess an estate, having either inherited it from your fathers, or obtained it by some exchange. Call up therefore in memory and count over, if you can, all who have occupied it before you. And direct your mind also to the time to come, and think how many are to occupy it after you. Then tell me who owns it, and to whom does it especially belong; those who have had it, or those who now have it, or those who in the future are to have it? For if some one should in some way or other call them all together, the owners would be found more numerous than the clods. And, further, if you wish to see exactly what our life is like, call to mind if ever in summer, while traveling, you have seen a flourishing tree extending far enough <sup>151</sup> in breadth and height to serve with its shadow the purpose of a shelter. You were glad to come under its shade, and there you remained as long as possible. And when it was necessary to move on, even as you were thinking of setting off again, another wayfarer appeared. And you took up your luggage while he laid his down and appropriated all your conveniences, the bed of leaves, the fire, the shade of the tree, the water flowing by. And he began to recline and rest, while you resumed your walk. He, too, enjoyed the place and then left it. And that one tree was, in a single day, the temporary lodging-place for perhaps ten strangers. And that which was enjoyed by all belonged to but one owner. And thus also the abundance of our life here delights and supports many, while it belongs to God alone, who has imperishable and indestructible life. <sup>152</sup>

You can call to mind an inn where, when traveling, you have put up. There, as you brought nothing with you, you were provided with many things, bed, table, drinking-cups, a plate and other dishes of all sorts. But perhaps before you had used them as long as you wished, another came, panting, covered with dust and hard after you, forcing you from the inn and demanding as though they were his own the things that really belonged to neither of you.

Such, brethren, is our life, and, if anything, it is still more transitory than the things I have mentioned. And I wonder at the way men say, "*my estate*," and "*my house*," and thus appropriate by an idle syllable things which are not theirs, and, with two deceptive letters, clutch things belonging to others. For as on the stage no one actor has exclusive right to any given character, but any actor may assume <sup>153</sup> it, so is it in the case of the earth and its material things. Men one after another put them on and off like garments. Tell me, is there anything more enduring than a kingdom? And yet, consider the palaces, search for the royal robes. You will find that many of these have covered the bodies of several successive kings. And in like manner also the crowns, and the clasps, and the girdles—all an unstable heritage, a property common to them all, passing over from those who go to those who remain. And of what worth are the possessions of magistrates, the canopy, the silver chariot, the golden wand? Do not these things always attend the magistrate, yet never the same one long, but each for a little season? For as the bier receives now one form, now another, so also the insignia of office pass from one magistrate to another. Hence, too, the apostle has uttered very many calls <sup>154</sup> to us indicative of this thought. "For the fashion of this world passeth away";<sup>1</sup> and the phrase, "As having nothing, and yet possessing all things";<sup>2</sup> and again, "Who use it as not abusing it."<sup>1</sup> For all these sayings have this one intent, that it becomes us to live as creatures of a day, awaiting the signal for our departure.

And that you may clearly see that you are subject to the laws and ordinances of the Lord, to which it is incumbent on you strictly to conform, first, learn from self-observation that both your body and soul are wholly subject to the commands of virtue, and you are not master even of yourself, but it behooves you to act as a steward both in word and deed, and in every movement of your life. You have received from the Creator a body composed of many members and endowed with five senses for <sup>155</sup> the needs of life. And not even these are free and independent, but each is subject to law. And first, the eye is commanded, "Look upon nature and behold what it is right to see: the sun, illuminating all the world; the moon, shining upon the gloom and dusk of night; the stars also giving us of themselves

no great or independent light, but reflecting the beauty they receive. Behold the earth, hairy with plants and herbs";<sup>3</sup> the sea when it lies fixed in perfect calm, spread out like a level plain. For the sight of these and similar things benefit us. But other sights, which through the eye introduce harm into the soul, shun and flee, and put a veil over your eyes that you may not see. For it is better to darken the sense of sight, when it affords occasion for "the deeds of darkness."<sup>4</sup> On this <sup>156</sup> account, the Lord said to us through Matthew in the lesson of yesterday: "Every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."<sup>5</sup> And it is better to cut out the eye than that it should look upon things inordinate and lustful.<sup>6</sup> And the ear also has been forbidden to listen to anything that is evil. But it is right that it be alert to hear whatever is good, that it may transmit to the soul profitable words. But if any evil companion, ready to deal out plague and destruction approach it, and be on the point of pouring into it filth, one should flee from him as from a venomous beast. Let the tongue also, together with the mouth, exercise discretion. Let it say what is right; but let it refrain from forbidden things---reproaches, slanders, unjust accusation, evil speaking against the <sup>157</sup> brethren, blasphemy against God; and let it utter those things that are of good report, and pious; let it counsel good works, and let every man repeat the words of the sacred Psalmist: "I said, I will set a watch over my ways, that I sin not with my tongue:"<sup>7</sup> again, "With their tongues they deal treacherously:"<sup>8</sup> and again, "Why gloriest thou in evil, O man mighty in iniquity? All the day has thy tongue discoursed injustice; as a sharpened razor thou hast wrought deceit."<sup>9</sup> Let the tongue taste profitable things. Let the nose also exercise discretion, not always scenting luxury, nor drawing into the head fragrant odors of costly perfumes. For against such things Isaiah vehemently inveighs.<sup>10</sup> Let the hand, too, remember the commandments, that it touch not all things indiscriminately. Let <sup>158</sup> it be outstretched in almsgiving, not in plundering. Let it keep its own, not wickedly seize the things of others. Let it in beneficent visitation touch the bodies that are feeble and distressed, not those that are lustful and devoted to fornication.

This discourse has shown us that we are not our own masters, but stewards, for whoever is subject to laws and ordinances is a bond-servant and subject of the lawgiver. And if the members of our body are not free from authority, but regulated with reference to their functions, by the will of the Lord, what should be said to those who think that they have, without accountability, the possession of gold and silver and land and all other things? O man, nothing is your own. You are a slave and what is yours belongs to your Lord. For a slave has no property that is really his own.

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For naked you were brought into this life. What you have you have received by the dispensation of your Lord; whether you inherited it from a father, since God has so commanded,---for parents, he says, shall divide their possessions among their children,<sup>11</sup> or have acquired affluence by marriage,---for marriage also and the things connected with it are ordained by God, or by trade and agriculture and other agencies, God cooperating in them.

You see, then, it has been made evident that you have received things which are not your own. Let us now further observe what is incumbent on you, and what kind of control you have over them. Give to the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the afflicted, do not neglect the needy nor the outcast at the corners of the streets. Do not be anxious about yourself, nor stop to <sup>160</sup> consider how you will live to-morrow.<sup>12</sup> If you do these things the Scripture says that you shall be honored by the Lawgiver. But if you do not heed the command, you shall be severely punished. These things I do not regard as characteristic of one who is irresponsible and lives in independence. But on the contrary, these numerous and repeated commands suggest to me a man strictly governed, subject to a master's laws, and rigidly accountable for his conduct as an administrator. But we, living how heedlessly, neglect the wretched and the poor, while they die in misfortune; and vying with each other in lavishness, spend our money on vanities, supporting a multitude of prodigal flatterers, and trailing after us hordes of ill-starred parasites; again, scattering our wealth to gladiators, and for wild beasts, and giving for horse-breeding <sup>161</sup> regardless of expense; and again, spending our abundance on jugglers and actors and persons equally worthless. And we have a fruitless experience, and one bordering on madness; for from expenditure that brings uncounted gain, and eternal salvation, we resolutely withhold our money, refusing to part with even a few obols; but where the expenditure is the occasion of sin and of countless pains and of the fiery punishment itself, of our own accord we let it flow. Prodigality anticipates the request, and opening all our doors, we lavish our wealth on those that are without. But this is not the mind of servants waiting for their lord, but of lusty, unbridled youths given over to revels.

But if you wish, my hearer, to see a steward administering with fear and wise discretion the things committed to him, open the book of David; find those words <sup>162</sup> where one inquiring concerning the appointed time of his end, says to God, "Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the number of my days, that I may know what I lack."<sup>13</sup> You

see in these words, as an image in a mirror, the attitude of the one who prays; you see that he is very fearful; he foresees that which is to come, and, expecting judgment, is concerned about the appointed time, that the signal for his departure may not find him unprepared. And he seeks to number and know how many days still remain to him, in order that he may zealously fulfil his task before his Lord comes. Now if we carefully compare what the dying man experiences, and what the man who is cast out of his stewardship endures, we shall find that the end of each one of us is like that of a steward. <sup>163</sup>

For the dying man turns over his control of affairs to others, just as the steward does his keys; the latter on being cast out of an estate, the former on being cast out of the world. Deeply grieved, the steward retires from his own labors---from the estate rich in vineyards, gardens, houses. What then do you think the dying man experiences? Does he not bewail his possessions? Does he not piteously survey his house as, against his will, he is torn from it, and forced in spite of his attachments, to go far from his treasures and storehouses? And when he comes to the appointed place, when he hears the words, "Render the account of your stewardship, show how you have obeyed the commandments, how you have treated your fellow servants, whether properly and kindly or, on the contrary, grievously and tyrannically, smiting, punishing, and withholding the alms that mercy <sup>164</sup> dictates," then if he shall be able to render the master gracious, by showing that he has been a faithful servant, it shall be well with him. But if he cannot thus render him gracious there will remain for him not simply beating with rods, or the dark prison, and iron fetters, but fire unquenchable and eternal darkness, never illumined by a ray of light, and gnashing of teeth as the Gospel has plainly taught us. <sup>14</sup> If indeed you are never to be cast out of your present possessions on the ground that they belong to another, revel in the world and with every sense let pleasure be unrestrained. But if these things are to be brought to an end and we are to enjoy them for no long time, let us, brethren, fear our removal hence, and live during the time of our sojourning as the Lord has commanded. Let us not be led away as prisoners for debt; <sup>165</sup> but let us go as free men, taking with us an approving conscience, and such an account of our conduct as will not be condemned by the Lord.

That rich man whose land brought forth abundantly, was a wicked steward of the earthly life, since in the abundance of his fruits he purposed nothing useful, but, enlarging the belly's desire and the broad and vast pockets of greed, designed all for his own enjoyment, saying, "I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and will say to myself, Thou hast much goods laid up; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." <sup>15</sup> But while he was yet speaking, the death angel stood at his side, to conduct him from the earth. A dreadful fellow slave was come to drag him from his stewardship; and what profit was there in his plan for the gratification of his selfish desires? Now <sup>166</sup> this has been vividly portrayed for our admonition.

And what does experience teach us? Do not the events of each day loudly proclaim the truth of the parable? Do we not see the man in health at midday, dead ere the appearance of the evening star? And the man strong at evening, not alive to greet the beams of dawn? And another departing this life while eating? And who is so foolish as not to perceive at a glance that daily, now one, now another, we are being removed from our stewardship here? But the good and faithful steward, whose conscience approves his own administration of his stewardship, is of Paul's opinion. For Paul, though the Lord did not urge him, was in haste to go to his Master, and longed for his release, and of his own accord resigned his stewardship, saying somewhere, "Wretched man that I am! who <sup>167</sup> shall deliver me from the body of this death," <sup>16</sup> and again, "But for me it is well to depart and be with Christ." <sup>17</sup> But one who is earthly in mind, and really akin to the clods, being confounded at the change which overtakes him, utters such lamentations as did the man of the parable, "What shall I do, because my Lord takes away the stewardship from me? I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed." The lamentation of an idle and pleasure-loving man! For to weep at his departure, and to lament the sensuous enjoyments of the flesh, is proof that one is engrossed in his estate; and to be incapable of toil is the mark of an idle and supine life. For if he had been accustomed to industry, he would not have hesitated to dig.

But further, to carry out the meaning of the parable, after removal to the eternal <sup>168</sup> world there is no longer place for importunity. And therefore let no one of them there say, "I cannot dig." For even if he could, no one would give him the opportunity. To this life belongs the obedience of the commandments, and to the life to come the reward. So that if you have done nothing here, it will be useless for you to think of digging, since you will have left the vines behind. Nor will you benefit yourself at all by entreating. And we have a notable example of this in the story of the foolish virgins, who were delayed for lack of oil, and shamelessly asked it from those who were wise. <sup>18</sup> But they got no help, and turned away unsuccessful; the narrative showing that, at the bridegroom's appearing, no one may use another's oil, that is, another's rectitude, for his own benefit. For each one is <sup>169</sup> clothed with his own conduct as with a garment, whether it be splendid and costly, or mean and like a beggar's cloak. But to put off this garment is not possible, nor to remove it and exchange it for another, nor to beautify and adorn it by the gift or loan of another in the time of

judgment, but each one remains such as he is in truth, whether poor in good deeds or rich.

But what can we say concerning the remission of debts which the unjust steward contrived, that he might through his fellow servants secure relief for himself from the hardships of his downfall? For it is not easy to convert this into allegory consonant with Scripture, but after long reflection something like this occurred to me: All of us who busy ourselves about the rest to which we are destined, by giving what is another's, work to our own advantage; now by what is another's I mean what <sup>170</sup> belongs to the Lord. For nothing is our own, but all things belong to him. When, therefore, any one anticipating his end and his removal to the next world, lightens the burden of his sins by good deeds, either by canceling the obligations of debtors, or by supplying the poor with abundance, by giving what belongs to the Lord, he gains many friends, who will attest his goodness before the Judge, and secure him by their testimony a place of happiness. Now they are called witnesses, who have secured for their benefactors favor from the Judge, not because they inform him of anything, as though he were ignorant, or did not know, but in the sense that what has been done for them relieves those who have helped them from the punishment of their sins. For just as the blood of Abel was said to cry unto God,<sup>19</sup> in like manner the good <sup>171</sup> deed, too, shall be said to testify on behalf of the upright in our Lord, Christ Jesus. Now to him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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[Footnotes renumbered and moved to the end]

1. <sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 7: 31.
2. <sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 6: 10.
3. <sup>1</sup> Aristotle, De Mundo 5:11.
4. <sup>2</sup> Romans 13: 12; Ephesians 5: 11.
5. <sup>1</sup> Matthew 5: 28.
6. <sup>2</sup> Matthew 18:9.
7. <sup>1</sup> Psalm 38: 2 (Lxx); 39: 1.
8. <sup>2</sup> Psalm 5:10 (Lxx); 5:9.
9. <sup>3</sup> Psalm 51:3, 4 (Lxx); 52:1, 2.
10. <sup>4</sup> Isaiah 3: 18 ff.
11. <sup>1</sup> Proverbs 19:14.
12. <sup>1</sup> Matthew 6: 34.
13. <sup>1</sup> Psalms 39:4; 38:5 (Lxx).
14. <sup>1</sup> Matthew 13:42, etc.
15. <sup>1</sup> Luke 12:18, 19.
16. <sup>1</sup> Romans 7: 24.
17. <sup>2</sup> Philippians 1:23.
18. <sup>1</sup> Matthew 25: 1ff.
19. <sup>1</sup> Genesis 4: 10.

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