

Sermon Proper 20 2019

September 22, 2019

Luke 16:1-15

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

We have to admit as we hear this parable it's a really odd situation, isn't it? After all, what happens here? Here you've got this guy, this steward, who's in charge of a portion of his master's business dealings. This guy was apparently pretty sleazy, because he gets accused of misusing the master's money. In fact, he has these charges that are brought against him. Now to take a quick second, these charges, this word for them comes from the same root at where we get the word devil, or diabolical. I've mentioned that before that this word means at its root level to divide, to cast or throw between, and that's what these accusations do. They divide, they cast division between the man and his master. And they should. This guy has been stealing, right? It's right that he should be in trouble.

And so what does he do? Well, first, he hits that point where he freaks out. He realizes that this means no income for him. How's he going to survive? What's he going to do? Then he considers the specifics. He can't do the manual labor. He's too weak for that. He can't beg. That's too much shame for him. So what does he do? He figures out a way to look good so that he can find other work. He gets the debtors for this master of his, and he tells them to slash all their bills. He cuts the oil debt in half. He cuts the grain bill by twenty percent. He does some really funky accounting and he gets in good with these debtors. He shows some real, what we would call, street smarts here, doesn't he? And why is it so smart? Is it just because he figures out a way to look good himself? Is it just because he weaseled a way into making sure he had work? Is it because he did the right thing? No. No, he didn't do the right thing at all. But here's the real point. How did the master respond? You'd think he'd be mad, wouldn't you? You'd think the response of the master would be anger. "You know what you cheated me in your misuse and now you're cheating me again!!!", right? But no. The master isn't mad. What does he do? **The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.** He commends him. Why? Why would the master commend him for this shrewdness? Because not only was it smart, not

only did it make the manager look good, it made the master look good at the same time.

Of course as I say that, that the master would comment this dishonest man for his dishonesty isn't what is so striking, is it? No what's so striking is that our Lord would use this parable to teach us. That the Holy Spirit would inspire Luke to include these words in our Gospel, and that in those words Jesus would set forth this dishonest steward as an example. In other words, what's so weird is that it seems as though our Lord is commending this idea of dishonesty here. So, what's going on then? Well, look at what our Lord says: **“the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”** So what's He saying there?

Well, have you ever met someone willing to work with all their effort to make a quick buck, or even quick riches, and yet they spend all their time being poor. Whereas, if they would just dedicate that effort to hard work they could make a living? We get people who come to the church and ask for money, then you start talking to other pastors and find out they go there too. And you realize that they're spending all their time doing that. But what do they find? They find a way to get by.

Or in a very different way, look at how media and culture are being influenced away from Christian thinking. There's a sort of machination occurring by those opposed to the faith, a working where they're succeeding into also manipulating the world into opposing things of faith. Now I'm not saying that everyone who publicly speaks in a way that is sincere but contrary to the Bible is someone who just hates Christians out of hand. But for example, look at how many people very publicly attack Christians for views that have been held, not only by Christians, but by large populations in societies across the world. And with what rhetoric? Mean, bigoted, hateful. And look how wise this is in the eyes of the world. Look at the traction it's gaining. **The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.**

So then, how does all of this transfer to the faith? Well, to focus where our Lord does, consider money. How do you use money? So often, we think of our money in terms of how it will buy us a nicer car, or a bigger house, or the shoes, purses, watches, and phones we want. But what about the kingdom? The master in

the parable commended the manager, as I said, because the manager made the master look good. How do we use what we have to make our master look good?

Or maybe take a step back. Who is our master? Who is your master? Who has mastery over what you do, or whom do you serve? Jesus made the point clear, didn't He? Are you serving money, are you serving things? Are you serving your house, your car, your possessions, or the things valuable to the world? Watch it. **No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.**

No you can't serve both. You'll cling to one and despise the other. Cling then to Jesus, right? The money will fail you. The things of this world will fail you. Sure you can accumulate all of the wealth, all of the stuff, all of the comforts and pleasures. You can even accumulate all of the accolades, but at some point the bottom's going to fall out on all of it. At some point, even if there's never another recession, market crash, or financial crisis, at some point you'll reach the call that comes to everyone, and money won't help you then. You won't be able to buy eternal life, not earn it, nor have others commend you into it.

So, who must be our master? What should we do with what we have then? Use it for something that will benefit that which is eternal. Use it to make our master look good. How do we do that? By generosity. By using that unrighteous money, the unrighteous mammon to make friends with an unrighteous world. Showing them how much we don't care about what we have because the Lord cares for us.

In fact what we can show them most of all goes back to the beginning of the parable. In the parable the master calls to the manager. He tells him that there are charges, there are these accusations against him. In view of that, what does he do? He has him turn in the book of his account.

You see you have an account before God. Those of you that have had my new member class likely remember me describing this in a "T" chart. For those of you that don't know accounting a "T" chart is shaped like a "T" and on the one side of the "T" you'll put debits, and on the other, credits. That is on one side you'll put positives, and on the other, negatives. By virtue of the sinfulness we have by birth, by conception, our account is already in debt. On the negative side, we have an infinite debt. On the positive side, we have a big zero. We can try all we want to do good things, but the first issue is that of ourselves, we have no good. This means no

matter how good we try to be, without faith, we're only adding negatives to the account. Even if we could theoretically add good things, how much would it take to even balance out the account? An infinite amount, right? And if that isn't bad enough, we've got this accuser, the devil coming and pointing all this out. "Look at this account, look at how bankrupt it is!!!"

But this is where our joy is, where your joy as a Christian comes from. You have the One who has taken your debt. You have the One who saw just how unpayable the debt is. And what did He do? He came to earth doing all the good that could be done. He lived life perfectly under the Law, creating no negatives on His account. He went to the cross and there died, death being the infinite cost of sin, and Him being undeserving because of His sinlessness, paid all of your debt for you. And He rose again to show that by the cross, your infinite debt is crossed out, cancelled. And His infinite good is credited to you.

Make this one be your master, then. And seriously do this. Don't just give nod to the Lord and keep doing things that are self-serving, die to yourself. Most of all, unlike the unjust steward who was too proud to beg, don't be too ashamed to come before this lord and beg from Him. And I say that because the reality is that you'll have to try day after day after day to do this. You'll have to struggle and wrestle day after day to keep Him in that place as master, because our sinful nature will keep taking Him down from that throne and putting something else there.

So don't be ashamed to come with your hands out to your Lord and beg from Him. It's in that desperation, in that humility and dependence that you'll actually hear the praise, the commendation of this God. Think about it, just as the master commended the manager, so also the Lord commends you. That manager didn't deserve it. But neither do you. And yet that's the love shown to us by our Lord. The love in His life, death and resurrection. The love in the cross. Amen.