**Luke 16:1-9,13** June 26, 2022

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*Luke 16:1-13Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’ 3The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg—4I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’ 5So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ 6‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’ 7Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’ 8The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. 9I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings…*

*13“No servant can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

If you are not a high school senior, imagine that you are!

Life is before you. There are hundreds of paths. Which are you going to pursue? Some of your friends seem to know exactly where they’re going. They have a career picked out. They have a college picked out. You can imagine them succeeding every step of the way. You? Not so much. It is frightening. So you ask yourself, “What do I want to do?” Well, the president of ECTC just down the road, instead of aspirational advice gave this practical advice to undecided high school seniors: “The first question shouldn’t be, ‘What do I love doing?’ but, ‘What am I good at?’”

Back to being a teenager thinking about your future… when you think about what you are going to do with your life, how many of you are going to say, “I would like to be a servant.” Maybe in 19th century England that was a thing—to be a servant in one of the grand houses of the land. But that is hardly the American dream: “I want to be a servant.”

Well, Jesus has another take on it. Jesus says the question isn’t whether or not you are going to be a servant. You are servants. All of you. Me, too. The only question is whom you are serving.

**Which Master Do You Serve?**

In getting Christians to reflect on whom we serve, Jesus tells a parable. And maybe you are thinking, “I should know this, but, what is a parable?” Quick reminder: parables are stories, realistic stories, but just stories, that Jesus told to do some spiritual teaching. One pretty useful working definition of a parable is: An earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

Jesus’ parable before us today is one of his not so well known parables. There’s something else about this parable: it is very easy to misunderstand. It is easy to misunderstand because it just plain doesn’t sound like something you would expect Jesus to say.

What were you thinking as Jesus’ parable unfolded? Were you waiting for the rich man to “get it,” to get called out for having so much? Nope. When you heard that the rich man’s manager was “accused” of wasting the wealth entrusted to him, were you waiting for those accusations to be proven false? They weren’t. As the manager wondered what he would do after the unemployment line, did your heart bleed for him? Did you think, “So unfair!” It wasn’t. In fact, as the parable went, this man proved that the accusations were well-founded, that he deserved to lose his job, and that his rich master shouldn’t have entrusted him with a dime.

Did you root for the manager as he gave discounts to his master’s debtors? “Yay! That rich master had it coming! He probably got it on the backs of the poor!” Well, this manager was no philanthropist. His only—his *only*—concern was a life without calloused hands or unseemly if well-earned humiliation. ***“I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg—I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses…”*** If it had been beneficial to charge the debtors more, this guy would have done so. After offering those discounts to ***“each one of his master’s debtors”*** were you waiting for the other shoe to drop—for him not only to lose his job but also his freedom? Yet when that dishonest manager was called before his boss, your jaw hit the floor as you heard Jesus say, ***“The master commended the dishonest manager.”*** What? The master praised him?

At half a dozen different points in this story you want to stop Jesus. You want to tell him like the Grandson in the movie *The Princess Bride*—remember how when grandpa was telling the story and the hero Wesley died and the grandson shouted, “No, no, grandpa! You’ve got it all wrong. That’s not how the story goes!” You want to say that to Jesus! He’s got this story all wrong!

It sounds like Jesus is praising the dishonest manager when the rich man commends the dishonest manager. Well, think about this. If you were ever a parent with a smart-alleck kid, you know exactly why that master is commending his former manager: “Just because I’m laughing doesn’t mean I can’t punish you for what you did.” Right?

So whom was the dishonest manager serving? You know: wealth.

Well, Jesus knew that this parable was a challenging parable, so he explained it. He didn’t always do that. But this for this one he did. Starting in the middle of verse 8, Jesus gave an explanation. By God’s grace alone, we hopefully do not resemble that cowardly, narcissistic, thieving manager. Yet—believe it or not—there is something Jesus wants us to learn from him.

Here’s how Jesus explained his mystifying parable: ***“The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.”*** Let’s explore that. There are two types of people: “People of this world” and “people of the light.” People of this world do not have eternal life, do not see Jesus as the Son of God descended from heaven. They live for the here and now and nothing more. On the other, hand people of the light have seen the darkness of their personal sin and also the life-giving light of Christ. People of the light humbly look to Jesus as their Savior, trusting his forgiveness, asking his guidance.

But here’s the thing, the people of this world, they know how to leverage their situation for their goals, and they act on it. This unjust manager—it may be a parable, but we can well imagine someone just like him, can’t we! Look at him. He called in *every single one* of his master’s debtors. He cut a deal with all of them. Dig ditches? Beg on the streets? Nothing doing! By gum, he was going to be welcomed into the houses of the rich and famous in his city. And he made it happen! And so it is with the world around us. So many people whose horizons never rise above this world nearly kill themselves getting the things of this world.

We, whose sight is set on something better than the things of this world—Jesus urges us to have that sort of zeal, but for very different purposes. ***“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”*** One thing to make clear, Jesus was not talking about some sort of crass work-righteousness to get you into heaven. He was talking to already saved people. He was telling his disciples—or I should say—us to look at that unjust manager, and as zealous as he was in pursuing his own selfish worldly ends, we should be that zealous in using earthly wealth for heavenly ends.

Earthly money for earthly ends might buy you a dinner, a car, a boat. It might even buy you a mansion or an early retirement. But all those earthly ends end, and with all of those stripped away you will one day stand before your Creator to be judged.

Instead, says Jesus, use earthly wealth for heavenly ends. Go on, spend $40 to get a good quality Bible that will be a joy to read, and a guide for your life. Do a gift in kind to help with a repair on the church, supply communion supplies, put coffee in the coffee maker for our fellowship time. Weigh the options of what you do with your paycheck. How about a donation to world missions, or a medical mission, or a Christian home for unwed mothers? Or, most of all, regularly support your local church in its Gospel efforts through regular offerings. Put some thought into what Jesus is saying.

Watch that unjust manager muscle every advantage he can out of earthly wealth, right up to the moment his master summons him for his termination. If he is that eager to use earthly wealth for earthly ends, shouldn’t you who have heaven be just as serious about leveraging earthly wealth for much better ends, heavenly ends?

That’s what Jesus means when he says, ***“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”***

Contained within Jesus’ direction to wisely use worldly wealth is a promise to those who do what he says. His promise is that what you spend in heavenly pursuits will not be lost. God knows. *And* those whom you will one day meet in heaven, they too will know. They will welcome you into heaven, grateful for the kindnesses you did and they weren’t even aware of while on this earth. The Christians down the pew will know all the times you prayed for them. The people in exotic sounding places like Zambia and Indonesia and Portugal will know about your offerings sending Gospel missionaries into their town. Your own children will finally realize the sacrifices you made so that they would know their Lord and Savior. That’s Jesus’ smiling encouragement, ***“Use worldly wealth… so that… you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”***

But here’s one concern. If those are the positive results of doing Christ’s will, does that mean my failures to do those things will be an eternal burden of shame? No. In heaven, sin will be forgiven, it’s shame forgotten forever, and Jesus glorified. Yet do not let your sinful human flesh seize upon that as an excuse to be lazy with wealth. Let it only be the assurance that heaven will be a place where our sins and failures will never be brought up again.

Having taught us the truth, Jesus now plainly says, not in parables, ***“No servant can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.”*** So, who is your master? Whom do you serve? Look at your house payments, car payments, how much you spend a month on eating out. How does God rank in all that?

Well, here God’s word gives us guidance. We don’t have time to do a deep dive into this, but as a whole God’s word gives us three principles worth remembering. For those who take Jesus’ words to heart and earnestly want to serve God with their money, rather than serving money as their god, here are the three principles.

First, let your giving be thankful giving. When you give to God, let it not be with eyes that are sad to see the offering plate going farther down the pew, taking your money with it. Instead, when you give, remember that *“you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”* Give joyfully.

Second, give *first* to God. This doesn’t mean you have to give more to God than your mortgage payment. But it means that giving to him should be a number one priority. Don’t give leftovers. Don’t give the spare change in your pocket or purse. Give the first-fruits, the best.

Third , God’s word guides us, *“Set aside a sum of money in keeping with [your] income”* (1 Corinthians 16:2). Find a percentage and give it. God does not command us—I want that to be clear—but he does give us a target. God’s Word encourages that we give 10% to him. Perhaps there will be a time, a trial when our percentage will not be possible. (I will say that I have never had such a time in my life.) For the sincere giver, those times will be few and far between. Set a proportion and stick with it.

Whom is the master you serve? Prove it. Use wealth to serve God. Serve God with wealth. Thankfully prioritize proportionate giving. Amen.