

Serve your true Master with wisdom.

Text: Luke 16:1-13 for October 13, 2019 by Pastor Bolwerk

Jesus also said to his disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager who was accused of wasting his possessions. ²The rich man called him in and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you can no longer be manager.' ³"The manager said to himself, 'What will I do, since my master is taking away the management position from me? I am not strong enough to dig. I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from my position as manager, people will receive me into their houses.' ⁵"He called each one of his master's debtors to him. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶He said, 'Six hundred gallons of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write three hundred.' ⁷Then he said to another, 'How much do you owe?' And he said, 'Six hundred bushels of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and write four hundred and eighty.' ⁸"The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the children of the light are. ⁹I tell you, make friends for yourselves with unrighteous mammon [worldly wealth], so that when it runs out, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings. ¹⁰The person who is faithful with very little is also faithful with much. And the person who is unrighteous with very little is also unrighteous with much. ¹¹So if you have not been faithful with unrighteous mammon [worldly wealth] who will entrust you with what is really valuable? ¹²If you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you something to be your own? ¹³No servant can serve two masters. Indeed, 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 mammon [worldly wealth]."

How independent are you? We are taught from an early age to be independent, to take care of ourselves and stand on our own two feet. We like to think we are the masters of our destinies, that we are in control of our lives. Yet in our modern, fast paced, high-tech world we often become slaves to the very things that are supposed to make our lives easier. We become slaves to the clock as we deal with calendars packed with activities. Some of us are slaves to our T.V.s or the internet and their constant stream of news and entertainment. Some people become enslaved by their cell-phones or e-mail as they are constantly checking for updates from others. Or try getting around without a car or some other type of transportation. We may even feel like slaves to our jobs, or school. Yet, for as much as these "masters" demand our service we need to remember, they are not our true master. Ultimately, they are not in control of our lives. They are not the ones to whom we owe our undivided and faithful service. With his parable Jesus is reminding us to:

Theme: Serve your true Master with wisdom.

- I. Being trustworthy with worldly wealth
- II. So you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings

In this parable Jesus describes the manager of a rich man as being "shrewd." The word literally means to be wise - to think through a situation and then determine an appropriate course of action. But the way Jesus uses this word causes us to realize it means something more than just "wise." Jesus is describing someone who is cunning and crafty, using his wisdom for personal gain. The manager showed that he had brains, talent and skill because his scheme took

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planning, preparation, and a quick execution. Even the rich man who was firing him was impressed.

As impressed as he was, the rich man still fired the manager because the manager was a crook. He was a thief who displayed his greed for personal gain while being completely unconcerned about what his greed was costing others.

The manager's actions made it clear to the rich man that he could no longer be trusted. Jesus said, **"The person who is faithful with very little is also faithful with much. And the person who is unrighteous with very little is also unrighteous with much"** (v. 10). A person's actions show how trustworthy they are. The manager actions of misusing his master wealth made it clear that he could not be trust with anything. The manager was dishonest with much, so he couldn't be trusted even with a little.

Jesus connects this worldly parable to a heavenly truth. **"So if you have not been faithful with unrighteous [worldly wealth] who will entrust you with what is really valuable?"** (v. 11). If a person cannot be trusted with the riches God has given him in this world, how can he expect God to trust him with heavenly treasures? When the people of this world use what God has given them to benefit only themselves, they are proving to God that they don't want to serve him. They are serving wrong master.

How often do we serve the wrong master? How often are we misusing worldly wealth? It is easy to point a finger at the "shrewd" manager and say, "I am not like him. I'm not out ripping people off or taking things not rightfully mine. I'm not misusing other people's possessions." Really? The Bible says, **"The earth is the Lord's and everything that fills it, the world and all who live in it"** (Psalm 24:1). Everything belongs to God, and everything we have comes from God. So are we using God's things to serve God, or to serve ourselves? When it comes to the money God blesses us with do, we cheerfully give God the first portion of his money back to him, or does God only get what is left over after we've spent the rest on ourselves? Do we use what God has blessed us with to make sure his word is being proclaimed and the gospel shared with others, or do our possessions focus the spotlight on us and who we are? Do we willingly give of our time so that the work of God's church may continue, or is our calendar full of activities that advance our wants, goals and desires? Do we use our talents and abilities to glorify God and his name in this world, or do we use them only to bring ourselves glory? And what about all the other gifts that our heavenly Father gives us: our possessions, our family and friends, our toys, our hobbies, our jobs, our schools. Do we use these things to serve our true Master, or are we using them only to serve and benefit ourselves? Do we really give God our best, or do we just give God what is good enough?

Now maybe you're thinking, "Wait a minute. If God *gave* me these things don't I have the right to use these things the way I want to?" Certainly. God has never said you cannot have any time for yourself. God has not said you can't spend money on yourself or use your skills to help care for yourself. Being able to use these things for ourselves is a gift from God. But when using our money, time, or skills for ourselves takes a higher priority than using them to serve God, then we make it clear that we are serving the wrong master.

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Everything we have comes from God. Everything! So when we squander what God is loaning to us on our own greedy, selfish desires – whether that is to gain friends, or attention, or just to bring pleasure to ourselves – then we are not being trustworthy in handling what God has given us. If we are not trustworthy with God’s property (which is everything) then why should he give us even one inch of heaven?

Jesus’ sharp words of law help us see where we are being unwise in serving our true Master. Instead of using worldly wealth to serve our Lord and Master we have turned wealth into our master. Our lack of trustworthiness has shown us that we don’t deserve true riches. Jesus’ words shake us out of that spiritual slumber and get us to realize that we need his help.

Unlike us, Jesus perfectly served his God and Father. Jesus fully, freely, and perfectly submitted to his Father’s will. Christ proved himself trustworthy by completely giving himself over to serving God. He used everything at his disposal, not to serve himself, but to serve others. He healed, he fed, and he taught the good news of salvation. Jesus used what his Father had blessed him with to care for the needs of others. He even went so far as to give up his own perfect life to care for our need for forgiveness. Jesus didn’t pay for our sins with worldly gold or silver. He used his own holy, precious blood to wash away our all those times we served the master of our own desires, instead of serving God. Christ’s death saves us from our sins. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness, so that by trusting in him we are now in a right relationship with God. Through faith we inherit the eternal property that Jesus is preparing for us. Trusting in the gospel promise of forgiveness we can serve our true Master with the wisdom of Christ. We can be trustworthy with worldly wealth when we trust in Jesus to guide us.

As Christians we know we don’t earn heaven. There is nothing we can do to pay for even one of our sins. Our salvation comes completely through faith in Jesus. There is nothing more we need to do to be saved. Yet God still expects to see fruits of our faith. If there is no fruit, there is no faith. Again, it’s not the fruit that our faith produces that save us. No, any good works that we do are purely a result of the Holy Spirit moving our faith to action. What is surprising is that God rewards that action. When we serve our God in humble faith, he rewards that service. So, serve your true Master with wisdom so you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

As people who have been recreated in the image of Christ, we are moved by his Spirit to want to serve our Master with everything he has given us. So what is the wisest way to use our worldly wealth? Jesus says, **“I tell you, make friends for yourselves with unrighteous [worldly wealth], so that when it runs out, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings”** (v. 9).

How will gaining friends in this life help us to enter the eternal dwelling of heaven? It all comes back to serving our true Master wisely. Jesus wants us to use our worldly possessions to show how much we trust him. We display our complete trust in God when we give of our wealth to serve his good purposes. Earlier in Luke’s Gospel Jesus said: **“Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not become old, a treasure in the heavens that will not fail [...]”** (Luke 12:33a).

We have seen how Jesus has given everything he had to serve us. That display of Jesus’ love prompts us to use what we have to serve others. By helping people around us with our earthly

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treasures we make it clear to the world that we don't trust in worldly wealth, but in heavenly treasures. We can "gain friends for ourselves" when we give of our time, skills, and money to provide for God's ministry here at St. Matthews. We give to make sure that the gospel continues to be proclaimed in all its truth and purity, not just to the members of St. Matthew's, but to those in our community who do not know the full truth of Jesus' saving work. We truly "gain friends" in Christ when we use what God has blessed us with to share the gospel with others. What better friend could you have than someone who you will be able to share eternity with? To share the Word of God beyond where we live, we use our worldly wealth to help care for our larger church body, the Wisconsin Synod. As we give to the Synod, we are giving to support the schools that train our pastors and teachers. We are giving to send missionaries to places we could not go on our own. We send out missionaries who are sharing the wealth of Christ with people around the world. Every time missionaries share the gospel and a person comes to faith it's like making a "new friend" in Christ. We may not know that friend in this life, but we will know them in heaven.

And as we serve others with our God given gifts, we may discover that one of the friends that we gain is someone who has already befriended us. In speaking to his disciples about Judgment Day Jesus said, "**I tell you: Just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me**" (Matthew 25:40). That's the kind of friend who will not only welcome you into heaven, he will make sure that you get there. Use your worldly wealth to serve your true Master, so that one day you will be welcomed into his eternal dwelling.

Independence. It's something we all work for our entire lives. But as believers in the true God we know that we owe our existence and all that we have to him. He is our true Master. Yet, when it comes to serving our true Master, he does allow us some independence. He gives us worldly wealth and then simply asks us to serve him with that wealth. He allows us to serve him as we see best. And we give our Master our very best because he has given his best to us. God has given us total and complete freedom from our sins through his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.