

September 18, 2022
Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 16:1-15 (1 Timothy 2:1-15)

ETERNAL RICHES IN CHRIST.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 16th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

In our text Jesus says:

“You cannot serve God and money.” (Luke 16:13)

In the original language, the word translated as **money** is the Greek word **mammon**. If you read my Friday email teaser for today, I made a huge mistake. I wrote that Jesus does not condemn **mammon** – only the idolatrous use of it. What I meant to write is that Jesus does not condemn **money** – only the idolatrous use of it. Money, property, and earthly goods are blessings from God. But when you depend on them for your security and self-preservation, your property and earthly goods have become **mammon**. They are false idols.

Please forgive me for my email mistake. In the New Testament, the word **mammon** is only uttered by the lips of Jesus and **always** with a derogatory sense of the materialistic, ungodly, and sinful. (cf: TDNT, 389) Because when your confidence is in your property and earthly goods you are not fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. We see this in today’s Parable of the Dishonest Manager.

Many people view Jesus’ parables as examples to inspire you to live a better life or Godly examples of how to treat others. Some try to find themselves in the story. *“Am I the prodigal son, the prodigal’s older brother, or his generous father?” “Am I the Good Samaritan or the guy who’s been beat-up and lying in the ditch.”*

But in today’s parable, who is going to raise their hand and say: *“Look at me. I’m the dishonest manager.”* And which one among us would praise a dishonest manager for being so unethical and wasteful with your possessions? So here is today’s spoiler alert. The purpose of most of Jesus’ parables is not to teach good conduct but to help us better understand the unlimited love and grace of God. The parable is not about dishonest manager, but about the rich man who is merciful and generous.

The text calls the manager a dishonest manager. (cf: Luke 16:8) In the original language the word *“dishonest”* is also translated as *“unrighteous, or wicked.”* (BDAG, 20) This unrighteous manager is the role model for the unrighteous sons of this world who look out for themselves and seek the riches of this temporary and uncertain world. The rich man is Christ Jesus, your Master, who loves and forgives sinners, bestowing the imperishable true riches of forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation.

In the parable the rich man hired a manager to be steward over his property and earthly goods. But this manager was dishonest and was wasting his master's possessions. When word got back to the master, he calls in the manager and fires him. He tells him:

“Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.”
(Luke 16:2)

In today's business world, this guy would have been escorted to the door so he could not do any harm to the company property. But this master does not have him turn in the books right then and there and throw him off his property. He does not have him thrown into jail or demand restitution. The master is generous and the manager knows it. The master lets the manager meander back home, pick-up the books, and meander back to the office.

But the manager also knows he has a problem. He is out of a job with no income. He is not strong enough for labor and too proud to beg. (cf: Luke 16:3) So he hatches and carries out a clever plan. He calls in those who owe his master money and one by one he cuts their debt. The first debtor has his bill reduced by half. The next is reduced by twenty percent. (cf: Luke 16:5-7) And an important detail is that each debtor changes the amount in their own handwriting. When the manager turns in his books, the master sees two things: first, the debts have been lowered, and second, his debtors know about it, because it is in their own handwriting.

What makes it a clever plan is – the manager knew the master to be generous and that he would allow the reduction in debt stand. And because the manager was the one who instigated the lowering of the debt, the debtors owe the him a debt of gratitude and will likely take him into their homes. The master commends the unrighteous manager for the shrewdness of his clever plan. Jesus then closes the parable saying:

“For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.” (Luke 16:8-9)

The sons of this world are the wicked and the unbelievers. The sons of light are the believers, the Christians. The sons of this world are clever and cunning. They know how to gain advantage for themselves. They are not slowed or deterred by matters of conscience or moral considerations. The only consideration they have is the bottom line on their accounting sheet and their security in this world. This is apparent in the parable. The unrighteous manager was too weak for labor and he was too ashamed to beg. His only concern was that someone would take him into their home. (cf: Luke 16:4)

Jesus calls this unrighteous wealth. It is unrighteous mammon. He is not saying money and possessions are bad in themselves – but they are unrighteous when you depend on them for your security and self-preservation in this world. Money and earthly possessions are temporary and fleeting. Money and earthly possessions are powerful. They seduce people and make them do things that they never thought they would do. So in the parable Jesus commands us to use our money and possessions just as *wisely* as the unrighteous manager – but using it in a *righteous* way. He says:

“... 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.” (Luke 16:8-9)

All that you have and all that you possess is not yours. It belongs to the rich man in the parable. It belongs to God Almighty and He has given it to you to manage. You are God's steward. Are you wasting His possessions or are you managing it according to His command? Are you spending all of your time, talents, and treasures on your own comfort and pleasure or are you giving your share to the work of Christ's Church?

In our text, when Jesus says, "*When it fails,*" He means "*When you die.*" (cf: Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel, 833) At the very moment of your death every one of your earthly goods, every dollar and cent, even your own earthly body will become the property of someone else. But God has eternal riches that He desires to bestow upon you for the sake of Christ's work of salvation on your behalf. Jesus says:

"If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³ 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."
(Luke 16:11-13)

A word of caution: This **does not** mean that God works *quid quo pro*... that you are saved based upon how much you give or how many good works you perform, No, for the Christian, gifts and works flow from faith. Good works and deeds and giving of your tithes and offerings are visible fruits of a true and living faith. St James writes:

"Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18)

"²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead." (James 2:26)

God desires you to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things – not in your money and earthly goods. God does not need your money or your good works, but your neighbor does. Your neighbor sees God through your kindness, compassion, and mercy. It is through your words and actions that your neighbor hears the Gospel message of Christ Jesus, who loves and forgives sinners, and bestows the imperishable true riches of forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation.

God's Law says: "*Do this and do not do that.*" His Gospel; however, says: "*Done.*" The Law only condemns. It is the Gospel alone that save. So here is the catch. Today's text is all Law – but please hear the Gospel as proclaimed in our epistle text by St Timothy:

"... God our Savior, ... desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all." (1 Timothy 2:3-6).

God says through His prophet Ezekiel:

"As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezekiel 33:11)

Not merely to live a long live on earth, but to live with Him in eternity. To make this to happen God sent His only Son to pay the price for your entrance into heaven. Your gifts and donations and your works do not pay your way. Your way is already paid. It is done. It is finished.

Everything you could not and cannot do has already been done. And in response to the One who first loved you, (cf: 1 John 4:19) you give your tithes and offerings so that others might come to know the forgiveness, life, and salvation in the One gave His life for them too.

God the Father is gracious and merciful. He has sent His Son to be your Savior. His entire earthly life was all about His Father's business. (cf: Luke 2:49) He kept God's Law perfectly, fulfilling every requirement without sin. He loved His neighbor, coming to not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom. (cf: Matthew 20:28) Everything that the Father had, He gave to Jesus and He managed it perfectly. And what was His reward? He was crucified in your stead. He was made to be sin for you, suffering God entire wrath against your sin, so you might become the righteousness of God (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:21) and spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Who would do such a crazy thing? Why would Jesus leave the glory of heaven to live a life of a peasant with no treasures, possessions, or home – all while knowing it was going to end in such a painful, horrible, bloody end? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (cf: Romans 7:25) Jesus did it for you. He did it because it was the only way that you might be saved. He did it so that you might be entrusted with the imperishable true riches of forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation.

The true riches of Christ Jesus are prepared on this altar where Jesus comes to you with the priceless treasure of His Body and Blood, given and shed for you to for the forgiveness of all your sins. Worldly treasure might sustain live on earth – but Jesus' Body and Blood sustains you from today unto life eternal.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.