

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 22, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 16:1-13 (NIV 84)

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2) So 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.' 3) "The 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-- 4) I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' 5) "So 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.' 7) "Then 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.' 8) "The 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.** 9) **I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.** 10) "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11) So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12) And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? 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."**

Fellow members of the Lord's Kingdom;

Recently there were reports in the news about an employee who stole thousands of dollars worth of electronic devices from an area school district. He allegedly sold those devices and shared the profits with the poor. The account of this dishonest employee reminded me of Jesus' parable from our text.

Jesus parable serves to remind us that we have not always been faithful managers of the blessings that the Lord has given to us. Perhaps, like the dishonest manager of Jesus' parable, we have been or are guilty of using God's gift of time and finances for selfish and self-serving purposes rather than in ways which will give glory to the Lord who is the source of all that we have. If that is the case then this lesson is call to turn away from our sins and to adopt a more God-pleasing attitude toward the resources which our Lord has graciously allowed us to use.

Let's discuss this text using the theme:

Theme: We Thank God for our Financial Blessings

1. By using them wisely (shrewdly)
2. By using them faithfully

The first 8 verses of Jesus' parable provide the back ground for the encouragements that Jesus gives in the last 5 verses of our text. Jesus' story is one which is easy to understand – it's the applications which are a bit more difficult for us to grasp. Let's briefly review the details of the story and then we'll be prepared to make the application to our lives.

Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. 2) So 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.' 3) "The 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--
4) I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

The dishonest manager was guilty as charged – he had no defense but he did have a bit of time on his side and he quickly made plans to take advantage of that time for his own benefit. 5) **"So 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.'** 7) **"Then 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.'**

He didn't waste any time – he was quick and decisive in his actions – implementing his plan at once. Notice how shrewd he was. He had a problem – he was going to lose his income due to his dishonesty. He doesn't waste time complaining or trying to figure out how to get a second chance rather he came up with a plan which would cause people to befriend him after he lost his job. He used the time he had been given to make sure that others owed him a favor by allowing them to reduce their debts.

8) "The 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.

Even though the rich man had had been cheated, he commended the dishonest manger. Note carefully the reason why the rich man commended the scoundrel who had swindled him. It wasn't because he was dishonest. It was because he was shrewd. He thought things out and figured out how to find a way to take care of himself. He's a great example of the shrewdness of the people of this world. Worldly-minded believers know how to do business, how to act decisively in a crisis, how to take advantage of a situation, how to deal with matters to their own benefit. In fact, Jesus suggests that they are often more shrewd in accomplishing their objectives and preparing for the future than Christians (people of the light) are.

Are we as shrewd as the dishonest manager when it comes to making provisions for an eternal future? Or do we show by our actions that we're really more attached to the present than we are to eternity? Are we quick to plan and carry out activities that are a part of the business of God's kingdom or do we rather make excuses and delay working for the benefit of the Lord's church – letting the things of this world take a higher priority? Do we always use the Lord's financial blessings in ways which express our thanks for them and in ways which will bring eternal blessings to others?

I said that the application of this lesson was the difficult portion of this text. One of the reasons for this is that our sinful flesh causes us to go into denial about our own misuse of the Lord's financial gifts. A second is that our sinful flesh often leads us to forget that the dollars we call our own are really the Lord's. (James 1:17) **Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.** And a third may be that we don't have a clear focus and understanding of how to prepare for eternity.

It is only when we are honest enough to acknowledge those statements as true about ourselves that we will even have the interest in applying this parable to ourselves. So let's acknowledge our misuse of the Lord's gifts to us as we trust in the Lord's forgiveness for those and all our other sins. Secondly let's set aside the attitude that the possessions we have including our dollars are ours and ours alone. They are blessings – loaned to us or entrusted to us by the one who created all things. We are accountable to him for their proper use. When we understand that the one who holds us accountable is the one who has also forgiven our sins we will be motivated to say with the hymnist:

To us are given gifts divine; All talents you have sent.
Inspire us now to use them well Your kingdom to extend.
We hold each gift a trust from you Nor claim it as our own;
We gratefully acknowledge, Lord, All things are yours alone. (CW 481, 2)

And then we will also pray: Lord help us to have a clear focus and understanding of how to prepare for eternity. Let's listen now as Jesus explains to us what our focus should be as we look forward to eternity. **I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.**

Jesus wants us to know that money can be put to good use by Christians. And among the priorities we should set would be using it to gain friends for eternity who will welcome us to our eternal dwellings when worldly wealth is gone. Simply put the Lord Jesus is telling us to use worldly wealth to win souls for his kingdom. Those whom we have helped with our earthly wealth may not always be able to thank us in this life time but they will surely greet us in the heavenly mansions. May we be generous then in our support of Christian missions and ministries knowing that as the Lord blesses the efforts of his church to reach out to the lost that more and more souls will be added to the Lord's Kingdom. Be shrewd – understand your mission and purpose and take quick and decisive action, support it generously with your prayers, your personal effort, and your financial offerings.

We can thank God for our financial blessings by using them wisely (shrewdly) and by using them faithfully. That means recognizing their value but not overestimating their value. **10) "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11) So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12) And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"**

Once again the Lord Jesus provides an application to the parable he has told. Christ's followers will consider earthly wealth as something which is far less important than our eternal treasures. We need to have a proper understanding of its value if we are to use it in ways which are pleasing to God. Jesus' words encourage our faithful use of our financial blessings. Those who have been blessed with money; and that includes all of us are expected to use this gift of God's grace in works of Christian service.

We have a proper view of the value of money when we see it as a tool to share the Lord's love and to do the Lord's work. So by all means use it to care for your families, use it for food, recreation, clothing etc. and surely the Lord will expect us to plan for the time when we will not have a steady income so saving and investing is not a misuse of the Lord's financial blessings. But also be sure to use it to assist those who are less fortunate, who do not know the Lord, to provide for those who share spiritual blessings with us and who carry the gospel to places we cannot go. Use it as the Lord himself would use it. When we look at money as a means to an end rather than an end in itself we will have the proper perspective and we will be able to avoid overestimating the value of money.

Again may we take our Lord's words to heart as we listen to the concluding verse of this text. **"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."**

Trying to serve two masters is impossible. Only one will reserve full respect. The same is true regarding our attitude toward God and money. One has true power, the other has deceptive power. Service to God is a blessed privilege. Service to money is a hopeless slavery.

Jesus warns us not to let money and the pursuit of it to take control of our lives. Don't let money and the accumulation of it become the chief goal in life. Don't let money take God's place in our hearts.

When we put these words in the context of Jesus parable and his other encouragements we will see them warning us to never overestimate the value of money. We will see them as another reminder to Thank God for our Financial Blessings by using them wisely (shrewdly) and by using them faithfully. Amen.