

Why Commend Dishonesty?

Luke 16:1-13

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

Would you say that what the manager did with his master's belonging was dishonest? Would consider it a form of stealing? Who here believes that whoever would do such a thing today should be thrown in jail? Isn't it amazing how we can see this so clearly, but when it comes to other issues today about which the Scripture teaches very clearly, we are confused? Is it because we are more in tune with the world than we are with God's Word and God's will?

So then, how can the master commend the manager/steward in our text for what he has done? What are we to think of Jesus' telling of this parable? What does it all mean?

You have probably heard this text used on numerous occasions. It was probably the basis for a stewardship sermon? In such cases, the parable Jesus told was probably completely overlooked or simply glossed over, and they skipped to the last portion of the text. They compared worldly riches and eternal riches. You were told not to love mammon and, to love God more and trust Him.

If you fear, love, and trust in God above all things – you recognize that all you have is God's first, you are simply a steward, a manager, of His gifts to you.

If you fear, love, and trust in God above all things – then your offerings will come first.

If you fear, love, and trust in God above all things – they you will tithe, you will give God 10% off the top, a first fruits gift back to God of what He's given to you.

You know what, all those things are completely true. But you already know all that! So, get to it!

That does not deal with the problem in our text. This dishonest manager is called shrewd by his master – in fact, by Jesus Himself. How can this be? He is shrewd, for he understands how to get by in the world and understands his master better than Christians understand God.

Do Christians really understand the gracious nature of God? Do they act on that belief? Or do they act as if God is some unmerciful master? Do they act as if God does not have an eternal plan for them?

We should act on what we know to be true about God in Christ Jesus. We should be generous with what He entrusts into our care, for He simply makes us stewards of His gifts. And, we should expect His forgiveness, and so come to him in repentance, expecting great things from Him.

This is what we need to consider. How can Jesus have the master commend the manager for his dishonesty? He is shrewd. He understands his master. He sees the merciful and gracious nature of his master who did not throw him in jail for his embezzling of funds, but only fired him. He knows the gracious nature of his master and so he boldly acts upon what he knows to be true about the master.

He does what he does to gain things in this world and life. He does not wipe out the debts completely, that would have been going a bit too far – he is shrewd. In fact, He may have actually helped his former master to at least get some money out of some who were deadbeats, who had not paid anything in ages.

But how could the master have responded like that? Look at the evidence. You can almost hear the box come thundering into the office to speak to the manager. He is a stern man! This is a strict set of circumstances! He comes in and says, "What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager. You are fired. I want complete records of everything you have done."

The manager changes bills so that others will benefit, making friends with those out in the world, and then closes out the books and hands them over. And the master commends him for his shrewdness.

He is not commended for his honesty. He did not even make any money for himself. He made friends with the world. He knew how the world would treat him, so he did what he was able to do to be accepted by other in the world. Going into the world – he acted worldly. He sought his own benefit by manipulating others. He acted shrewdly for he knew that his master would be gracious to him. He had already shown his merciful side, so the manager exploited that in order to be accepted by the world.

How do you act? We have another kingdom in which we live, but do we act with the same eagerness and zeal in the pursuit of it? Do we seek eternal things with the same zeal with which the children of the world seek those things that will not even last in this world – goods, money, fame, and power – all things that will fade once death claims us?

We spend how much of our time in pursuit of the things of this life, but do we expend the same effort to attend to our souls? Do you know your master? Do you trust Him? Do you know His grace and mercy to you?

God loves you so much He did the most amazing thing ever done in all of recorded history. He did something which most people do not believe, for it is so unbelievable. God gave His own Son to suffer and die for your lack of trust of God. His Son died to purchase your forgiveness for putting the world first and God second. Christ purchased everlasting riches with His own precious blood, shed for you, and He desires to give them to you.

How well do you make use of true, everlasting riches? Do you begin each day in your Baptism, giving thanks to the Lord that you have already died the second death and have eternal life? Or do you regard your baptism as just a point of history which has little relevance to you now?

Do you eagerly hear the Absolution, knowing that it is only in the Lord's forgiveness that you have the hope of salvation? Perhaps! Or perhaps you regard His grace as a safety net, as you decide which sins will be useful to you in the coming week. Or maybe you think that you've

heard enough of forgiveness to last a while, and no longer desire to hear of the Lord's love for you.

Do you take the time to prepare for the Lord's Supper, marveling that the Lord God of Sabaoth visits you, to serve you His very own body to eat and blood to drink? Or do you interrupt thinking about your to-do list long enough during the distribution to come forward and kneel, doing so lest someone think that you were daydreaming about your to-do list? Do you take seriously the truth that those who are unprepared will receive this Communion to their judgment? Or, do you set aside that Word of God for the sake of appearing more agreeable to the world?

Among us and all the world, there is no one righteous—not even one. We are far from faithful stewards of what our Lord entrusts to us. And sadly, we are probably more careful with worldly mammon than we are with the Word and Sacraments that bestow righteousness and life.

Even now, as the baptized people of God, you and I are still unrighteous stewards who waste what our Lord commends to our use. The day of reckoning is still deserved. But look at how our merciful Lord treats us. Although we often take His means of grace for granted and treat them shabbily, He does not relieve us of our stewardship. From now until the Last Day, He keeps us as His stewards. He wills that we continue to make use of His means of grace, so that through them He might forgive us for the sake of Jesus.

Furthermore, He wills that we use them to erase (completely—not just half!) the debt of others. As we encounter sinners who are burdened with a load of killing sin, we do not tell them to erase half the debt and go from there.

No, we proclaim to them the Word. We tell them that Christ has died for all of their sins—not half, not most, but all. We give our Lord's grace out to all who will receive it. Does our Lord grow angry that we give out His grace so freely? Not at all! He commends this as the mission of the Church. "Freely you have received," He declares; "freely give" (Mt. 10:8).

How abundant and excessive is the Lord's mercy for you! Because His Law demanded a level of righteousness you could not muster, He became flesh, gave the accounting and suffered the judgment for your sin. So that you might be forgiven, He continues to pour out His grace upon you by His Word and Sacrament, proclaiming you righteous for His sake—by His work, not by your own.

While this parable is about the Lord and his mercy, there is one thing for us to learn from the steward. Here it is: the steward's entire scheme rested on his lord's mercy. If his master was not merciful, he would have had the steward thrown out right away, imprisoned or killed for using his goods to his own advantage; but the steward used the lord's things to make friends, trusting that the lord would commend, and not punish, him. By the grace of God, we trust in the Lord's mercy. We confess our sin and unrighteousness to Him, trusting that He who gave His own life to redeem us will continue to save us now. And so He does. Your Lord commends you today with these words, "You are saved by My mercy this day, because Christ has accounted for your sin at the cross. So I declare you righteous, forgiven all of you sins in Him alone. Go in peace." Amen.

