

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Ninth Sunday after Trinity (2022)

Are You a Faithful Steward of the True Things?

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“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?” (Luke 16:10–12, ESV)

The Parable of the Dishonest Manager speaks of a disciple’s attitude toward possessions and yet, it is one of the most misunderstood parables of all the parables of Christ. Because many have had trouble understanding this parable, it has had many different interpretations. So a proper interpretation of this parable is critical if one wants to understand the cost of discipleship and its relationship to the Day of Judgment. Therefore, let us this morning seek the help of the Holy Spirit as we try to understand what our Lord Jesus is teaching us in this Parable of the Dishonest Manager.

If we read this parable and see it only as a secular story, then our understanding is self-evident. The dishonest manger, faced with a crisis of his own making, resorts to clever dishonesty in resolving the crisis. Done. Another clever man pulls his fat out of the fire. But such an understanding would be foolish and miss the mark because this is not just another secular story. Rather this parable is addressed to the disciples of Jesus, those whom He has called to faith. Therefore, we must look at this parable as prime catechetical material for our growing in that faith.

If we focus on the parable from our Lord’s perspective, then it is not the *dishonesty* of the manager that we should focus on, but rather on the *mercy* of the dishonest manager’s master. In the parable, Jesus presents the master as an honorable and merciful man, just as He expects His disciples to be honorable and merciful men.

When the master receives news of his managers dishonesty, he fires him, but he does not have him thrown in jail nor does he punish him in any way. There’s no question he had the right to punish the manager, but his action is simply to remove the manager from his employee. But what is not so evident, is the dishonest manager’s reliance on his master’s mercifulness in developing his solution for the problem he created. Therefore, focusing on the master’s mercifulness makes the dishonesty of the manager a moot point. His dishonest, cleverness does not outshine his master’s mercy. Looking at the parable from this point of view, the parable begins to come into focus.

When the dishonest manager is fired, he doesn’t protest, he knows he’s been caught red-handed squandering his masters’ possessions. Suddenly, he finds himself unemployed. Being a worldly man, his first reaction is to solve the problem from a human point of view. He asks himself, what can I do to extricate myself form the mess I created? He considers digging ditches or even begging, but both are out of the question. However, he knows he has hit rock bottom, so what, he asks, am I going to do? Being a shrewd fellow, he quickly hatches a crafty and dishonest plan to ingratiate himself to his master’s customers. He will adjust their accounts to

benefit himself, but even more cleverly, he will enhance his master's reputation in his customers eyes.

His entire plan is based on the fact that his master is an honorable man, respected and loved throughout the community. Trusting that his master will allow him a short period of time before he must leave, he uses this time to call on his master's debtors, granting them a discount from their indebtedness hoping they will think the discount is coming from his master and furthermore, they will also remember this gift was delivered by him. The readiness of the debtors to accept the dishonest manager's proposal indicates they truly believe this is a gracious gift from his master.

The goodness of the master reminds us that Jesus has told us we, too, are to be generous and merciful, saying, ***“Do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return . . . [and] Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:35–36, ESV)***

When the master discovers what the dishonest manager has done, he is faced with the decision of either reversing his dishonest manager's false generosity or allow what has been done to remain. Because he is an honorable and good man the choice is easy. Consistent with his own character, he allows the discounts to stand. The deed having been done, again rather than imprison his employee, he commends the dishonest manager for his shrewdness in managing his personal crisis in the way he has. The dishonest manager comes away unscathed because he could rely on the goodness and mercy of his master.

However, from the viewpoint of being a steward of God, we recall that St. Peter asked Jesus, ***“Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” (Luke 12:41, ESV)*** To which our Lord replied, ***“Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.” (Luke 12:42–44, ESV)*** Faithful and wise managers of God's gifts will receive their reward in eternal dwellings.

The first lesson that we should learn from this parable is that we are all stewards of God. In fact, St. Paul calls us ***“slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.” (Romans 6:19, ESV)*** We might all talk about our life, our time, our money, our car, etc. but we know, or we should know, that we belong to God and all that passes through our hands is in fact God's. We cannot look at ourselves as tenants, tenants pay an agreed upon rent and after that they keep the rest. But sadly, there are those who think their relationship to God is like a tenant. They give God His reasonable share, such as a tithe, then they do as they please with the rest. But if you are truly a “slave to righteousness,” you know that even what is left belongs to God. When we give our offerings, we should remember the words of David when he gave, ***“For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.” (1 Chronicles 29:14, ESV)***

Even though the master in the parable commends his dishonest manager for his ***“shrewdness,”*** (v. 8), let us not forget, he is commending him as a steward of unrighteousness. Jesus reminds His disciples, ***“The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.” (Luke 16:8, ESV)*** telling them, ***“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.”*** (v. 9) Here is the confusing part of the parable especially considering what Jesus has already said about wealth, telling His disciples, ***“Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is,***

there will your heart be also.” (Luke 12:33–34, ESV) Given these words of Christ, we are puzzled when He tell His disciples to use *“unrighteous wealth”* to make friends.

Jesus is encouraging His disciples to imitate the dishonest manager, but not as *“sons of this world.”* That is, He is not encouraging them to engage in unrighteousness, to bend the rules, to play the game, or to beat the system as do the *“sons of the world.”* Rather, as *“sons of the light,”* He encourages them to be ignorant in the practice of unrighteousness, such knowledge only has an advantage in this present age, it is harmful for the age to come. The *“sons of the light”* are to be prudent in the use of their possessions, recognizing that these are God’s gifts leading to eternal life. God’s gifts meant to be shared with those in need.

Therefore, when those moments in life arise where the use of your possessions may be helpful in pointing others to God’s merciful goodness in Christ, remember these words of Jesus: *“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?”* (Luke 16:10–12, ESV) Like the dishonest manager who trusted in his master’s merciful goodness, we trust in God’s merciful goodness, and faithfully use the worldly resources God has given us so that His merciful goodness in Christ will be seen by others that they, too, may be recipients of His mercy and called to faith. Then the faithful disciple will be given *“that which is [their] own”* and rewarded with the *“true riches”* of God.

Jesus closes this parable with a warning, saying, *“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 16:13, ESV) Thus, this parable begs the question, *Are You a Faithful Steward of the True Things?* Do you use the worldly wealth God has given you to benefit both the Church and those who may become disciples of Christ, or do you hoard it for yourself? Do you understand the proper use of the possessions God has given you? Are you caught between the love of money and the love of Christ? If so, remember that Christ says to you, *“You cannot serve God and money.”*

A worldly view of possessions may tempt a disciple to lose their focus on the main thing, their salvation. We are reminded that earthly possessions are coveted by the world. Jesus said, *“For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”* (Luke 12:30–31, ESV) Now we are not to think that possessions in and of themselves are to be condemned, they are not, but the idolatrous use of them is to be condemned. Such use becomes an alternate means of salvation. Jesus reminds us, *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* (Luke 12:34, ESV) Therefore, those who clutch to their possessions, who do not look to a merciful God in whom they can trust, but rather look to their possessions as a secure foundation in this life, giving no consideration to the life to come, will not receive a righteous person’s reward.

Such is the cost of discipleship, a war against yourself and your possessions. Jesus says, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”* (Matthew 16:24–26, ESV) The *“true riches”* of which our Lord Jesus speaks in this parable are the *“treasures of heaven.”* Therefore, this parable can be likened to when our Lord said, *“If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”* and again when He said, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break*

in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19–21, ESV)

Instead of acting like the dishonest manager, seeing worldly possessions as a means for worldly pleasure, use the unrighteous wealth that your righteous and merciful God has given you to make friends, so they will come to know of our merciful God and the blessed mercies He pours out upon all through His Son, Jesus Christ. Use unrighteous wealth so others will come to know of God's, Son's atoning sacrifice on the Altar of the Cross for the forgiveness of their sins and thereby be brought to faith that they, too, may be received into heaven and also receive you into the eternal dwellings which God has prepared for all who believe in His Son Jesus Christ. Do not be a dishonest manager of God's gifts but be a *Faithful Steward of the True Things*. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen