

The Gospel According to Luke

Luke 16:1-13

Reading: Luke 16:1-13

Sermon #67
February 9, 2020

Choose Wisely!

Jesus now turns and addresses his disciples. He presents what many theologians have determined to be a very difficult parable to understand. There are certain that parts of the parable that are difficult. However, this is God's Word and we must seek diligently to understand it and this morning I will do my best. There are two main characters in the story. The first is a manager who because of his dishonesty is about to be fired or let go. Second, is the master who has heard of the manager's dishonesty and is about to remove him from his position.

PRAY

Please stand as Garth reads God's Word.

What Shall I Do?

Jesus lays the foundation of the parable and what causes the dishonest manager to ask, "What shall I do?" Reading at verse 1, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. ² And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'
³ And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.' We understand the manager was going to lose his job because of wasting his master's possessions; it appears he was skimming or cheating his master on the loans due. The manager's only focus was his own wellbeing and how he could survive this disgrace; not the disgrace of cheating his master, but the disgrace of

being caught and it being made public. We see this with people in business and politics; they do not have a moral dilemma with cheating and dishonesty, they just do not want to get caught. The manager begins by asking “**what shall I do?**” to evaluate his options and begin to consider a plan of action. Being the manager of the investments of a rich man had placed him in the upper social strata of the community, but it was his master’s position and his job that placed him in a favored status, he was not born into it and had not earned it. So, once he is removed by his master, he will no longer have any social status and will be publicly disgraced. Verse 3 ends with his stating his concern that he would not be able to survive in the lower classes of society performing manual labor or begging. In addition to losing his job he would also lose his house which would have been part of the master’s estate and he would have no dwelling.

Here is seen a dishonest and shrewd man who knows the ways of the world and how to manipulate people. He is well aware that because of his position of managing and collecting the debts owed to his master, he was not liked within the community of the lower class he was now about to join. This was the purpose of the wealthy hiring a manager; the manager was the face of the disliked person collecting and enforcing the terms of debts owed and he kept the master at arms-length. The manager was the one who people tried to avoid on the street – this reminds me of Scrooge. Like Scrooge this manager had no friends. He needs a plan of action and he needs it quickly.

Choice of the Unrighteous

He ponders what he should do, for he is in a difficult situation. Reading at verse 4 he says to himself, “**‘I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’**”⁵ So,

summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷ Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'" Since no one likes him because he is the debt collector, he decides that the best way to make friends is to reduce their debts.

To fully understand what he is doing we must go back to Hebrew tradition at the time of Christ. In Hebrew tradition it was wrong to charge interest on loans. This is still true today with Islam. So, at the time of Jesus if one was found to be charging interest they could be brought before the authorities or be publicly humiliated for not being a pious Jew. To prevent this the wealthy hired managers or stewards to manage their finances so that if a problem arose it would be the manager who was hauled before the Sanhedrin or made a public example of sinful behavior.

So, the manager's plan to gain outside friends - is for him to reduce the debts of those who owed his master. Probably what he is doing is writing off the interest. This is a very clever move on the part of the manager. It gains him favors with people who are somewhat friends and people who will owe him favors that he will soon need and the master cannot say much because charging interest was illegal in the first place. Once fired he will not have a relationship with the master and he will need friends, who in truth are not friends but those who now will owe him.

Picture yourself owing the IRS a year's taxes on your wages and the IRS agent sets up an appointment and has the assigned authority and declares your tax debt is cancelled. He would be your friend or at the very least someone you owed

a favor to. Like the IRS agent, the manager's decisions were binding until his position is taken away. So, the manager has done a favor to these debtors, one he will remind them of down the road, as he needs a favor from them.

The manager has a set plan, as verse 4 states, "I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses." This man was very clever with the people of this world. He knew how things worked and knew how to manipulate the laws and systems. He no doubt would have made a good politician today. He was wise in the ways of the world and manipulated the circumstances to his advantage at the cost to others, just as many politicians do today.

The conduct of the dishonest manager, when he received notice of his soon termination, was undeniably quick-witted, shrewd and cunning. Dishonest as he was, in striking off or discounting the bills of debtors, he robbed his master of interest or profit and he certainly by so doing - made debtors owing to himself. Wicked as he was, he had an eye for the future. Disgraceful as his measures were, he provided well for himself. He did not sit still in idleness and see himself reduced to poverty without a struggle: he schemed, and planned, and contrived and boldly carried his plans into execution; and the result was that when he lost one home, he secured others who owed him and would help provide.

His concern had to do with providing a house or dwelling for himself, because sinners seek temporal dwellings. All their efforts are exhausted in the pursuit of worldly wealth and ease. That is why Lottery tickets are so popular. This is why people want to sue over everything; they want wealth at someone else's expense. A person who thinks earthly riches will make them happy has a chance with a lottery ticket of maybe, one in 500 million. Statistics show many who have

won do not gain happiness and many burned through the money. I was raised in a family that one's position and material wealth defined who they were. Joyce and I were making a good deal of money and it did not bring happiness and this is when I crashed and God took hold of my life and changed everything – praise God!

Where do you spend most of your energy and thoughts? Is it in acquiring worldly wealth and security? Money is a tool to be used to care for the needs of your family and provide for ministry and the poor – it must never become an idol, as the world views it. The pursuit of wealth for the power it can bring is vanity – for everyone leaves whatever they have gained behind when they die. Jesus told about 40 parables and about a third of them deal with wealth or money. It is very important that we get a handle on how to handle money for God's glory.

Choice of the Faithful

Verses 8 and 9 are interesting for several reasons, let me read them, “**The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.** ⁹**And 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.**” Here the master has decided to terminate the manager and it almost seems out of place for the master to now commend the manager's shrewdness.

As we evaluate what is being said, the master does not commend him for his dishonesty but for the fact that he can appreciate his cleverness in dealing with the debtors, working things to his advantage. In a way, Jesus also commends the shrewdness of the dishonest manager, but not his dishonesty. In fact, this manager is used as an illustration for his disciples at how diligent they should be in seeking an eternal security. This is also an illustration of how hard Christians should work

at evangelism of the lost for one can observe how hard the cults work to bring people to false religions under the control of the evil one. One is to work hard living out life in such a way it brings God glory!

Jesus through observation has seen “**sons of this world**” chasing harder after worldly goods that believers chase after treasure in heaven. If his disciples understood the ways of heaven as well as this manager understood the ways of the world, they would be much more diligent in laying up treasure in heaven and seeking an eternal security there. We are disciples of Christ also and this is our mandate as well.

This manger’s ambition was to make money work to gain him friends, influence and those that owed him favor. This is clearly the term in verse 9, “**by means of unrighteous wealth**” gained through dishonest means and used in dishonest or wicked ways.

Jesus’ point to his disciples is simply this: followers of Christ can use worldly wealth for eternal benefit. If used correctly worldly riches can equal treasure in heaven. If one uses the money God has entrusted to them for godly things, earthly wealth can become eternal wealth. However, the key is earthly wealth only becomes eternal wealth if it is given away. We give abundantly as God’s people because we truly see that it is more blessed to give than to receive and because it is being used to advance God’s kingdom and serve the poor. We do not give to make friends and to secure our future on earth but as we give, we are laying up treasure in heaven. Our giving is not to make someone indebted to us but because God would have us to do it for his glory and as kindness to others.

Here is how Paul communicated how the hearts of the saints are to be with money, reading in 2 Corinthians chapter 9, ⁶“**The point is this: whoever sows**

sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.⁹ As it is written, ‘He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’ ” Here Paul quotes Psalm 112:9. Continuing in verse 10, “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others,¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:6-15) Money is a tool God entrusts to us to be used for his glory and the expansion of his kingdom and to meet the needs of our families, the saints and for the evangelism of the lost.

Jesus has consistently taught that believer’s live in an evil world made up of broken and sinful people who are under the influence of the prince of this world, think back to chapter 6 of Luke we studied almost a year and a half ago,³² “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to

get back the same amount. ³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.” (Luke 6:32-35) Jesus is making the same point in chapter 6 and here in chapter 16. Everything can be used for both evil and good. The atom can be harnessed to produce electric power and manipulated to find cures for illnesses or it can be used to destroy, as a weapon. Mankind’s natural bent is for evil, only through the power of God’s Spirit that indwells believers are we able to overcome this world and our sin nature and use resources unselfishly for good.

Who Is Your Master?

For believer’s money is a tool, it is neutral, it is used to buy and sell and to be used for the kingdom of God. Taking up the parable in verse 10, “**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.**” ¹¹ 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.**” Money can be used for righteous or unrighteous things, it can be used to gain earthly material wealth and comforts, to have power over others or for eternal good; glorifying God, serving his kingdom, caring for the needs of family, our church community and the lost.

Jesus’ point here to His disciples is that if you are faithful with a little, with earthly wealth, then you will be faithful with true riches in the world to come.

However, if you cannot handle worldly money for God's glory why would you ever be entrusted with true riches or the eternal things of God?

This brings forward an important question for each person to consider and answer, "Who is your master?" Do you serve money or do you serve God? Is unrighteous wealth the end of all things to you? Or is God's glory the end of all things to you? Look at your checkbook to see if your pattern of spending brings you earthly comfort and happiness or eternal happiness. It is a very simple thing to determine, it will not take more than 10 minutes, but you do have to look and see what your check book and credit cards reveal.

Jesus has made a contrast here in this text between unrighteous wealth and true riches. He shows that both can spring forth from the same dollar bill. I can use money to serve me or to glorify God. In our story this manager was not even faithful with someone else's money. No doubt he would not have been faithful with his own either. All would have been done for worldly wealth.

Think back to what Jesus taught us 3 months ago in chapter 12, ³² "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ 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. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Luke 12:32-34)

If God has given you entrance to his kingdom for eternity, then the kingdom of this world really should not be unimportant, for we are sojourners. We should not be unfaithful when handling the riches of this world. However, if God has not given you the kingdom, then the wealth of this world should be hoarded and used to one's advantage. The connection between this week and last is that the "Prodigal

Son” believed the wealth of this world was all he needed to be happy. He squandered it on reckless living. When it was all gone, his life was near to its end and God came to realize his sin against and his father and he sincerely repented. The week there is no repentance and by the wealthy master or his manager and they are both lost.

However, as the Apostle Peter taught for those who believe in Christ as their Savior and Lord, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:9-12) If we believe in God the Father and Jesus Christ, God the Son, and we believe the Bible is the Word of God given to his children; then out of gratitude for our salvation and our desire to bring God glory we will make every effort to live as his children. By the power of the Spirit of God that dwells in every believer, as we submit to God and his Spirit, we die to our sinful nature and can overcome evil, grow spiritually, sin less, love more and use the wealth he has entrusted us with for his glory.

If I have one dollar, I should be thinking how it could best be used to serve Christ. I need to develop and execute plans for eternity. To God be the glory! Amen and amen!