

Sermon for September 21, 2013 – 18th Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 16:1-13

Theme: Be shrewd with the Unrighteous Mammon

- 1) *Don't let money make you an unrighteous steward*
- 2) *Use money to make heavenly friends.*

He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. ² "So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'³ "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ 'I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'⁵ "So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So 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?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'⁸ "So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. ⁹ "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. ¹⁰ "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. ¹¹ "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? ¹² "And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Opening Prayer: *Lord Jesus, Your goodness is eternal. Teach us to view and use the possessions of this world in the light of your heavenly kingdom. In your name we pray, Amen.*

Be shrewd with the unrighteous mammon! "What's an unrighteous mammon?" you might be thinking. It sounds like some beast from a horror movie. In reality, this beast is far from ugly and, in and of itself, it isn't unrighteous either. Mammon is money. It is called mammon, after a Canaanite god of wealth. It is called unrighteous because many people worship it rather than the LORD, and because of all the unrighteous things people use money for.

Let us learn to **be shrewd with the unrighteous mammon** - that is, let us learn to use our money wisely.

1) Don't let money make you an unrighteous steward, rather 2) use money to make heavenly friends.

Part One: Don't let money make you an unrighteous steward

Scripture describes money in paradoxical ways. In some places the Bible calls money a "good thing," a "blessing" from the Lord. In other places it is describes as an unrighteous god – the love of which is the root of all evil. Well, what is it - a great blessing or an unholy thing? The answers is both, because money is what you make of it. It is a great blessing, when used properly - with thanksgiving. When misused, money can speed a person to hell.

Jesus wants us to understand the proper use of money so that it can be a blessing instead of a curse, and he uses a unique parable to do this. But before we talk about the parable, we should talk about the dangers of mammon.

Money can easily become a god that we fear, trust and love above all things. How? Let me explain: What is the purpose of work? To earn money. And what is the purpose of money? To buy the things we need to live somewhat comfortably and securely. Because this is true, we are tempted to think that we need money to live and the more money we have the better our lives will be. So what do we do? We strive to earn more money. Because we worked for it, we see money as ours and ours alone – no one can tell us what to do with it. When funds run short we worry. When our wallets are full we are happy. How much money we can get directs our course. It leads us to accept or reject jobs, to work long hours away from our family, and to even find ourselves too busy spend time with Jesus. As you can see: money can easily become our god.

How often we forget that the Lord – and not money – is responsible for our health and well being. How often we forget that all we have is a gift from his hand – that it all belongs to him, and the Scriptures say: *The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it.* (Psa 24:1 NASB) Stop and think about what this means: Your home, car, clothes, TV, furniture, – everything you have and are belongs to the Lord. You are just a steward – a servant entrusted to use these blessings to the glory of God. And when we misuse these blessings entrusted to our care? Then we are just as dishonest as the steward in our text who was stealing his master's wealth to use for his own pleasure.

At the end of our text, Jesus reminds us. ¹⁰ *"He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.* ¹¹ *"Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?"*

Jesus views our use of money as a reflection of our love and faith in Him. Any person who would steal from his boss shows that he doesn't respect his boss. The same is true when we steal from God by misusing the money he gives us: we show contempt for Him. If we can't show our faith and love towards God by using money properly, then what makes us think that He would entrust us with the true riches of heaven?

Are you a faithful steward of all God has given you? Do you think about God and thank him for everything you have? Do use all your possessions with the awareness that they belong to the LORD? Sadly, every one of us must confess that we do not. And this should lead us to pray: "Lord, have mercy on us for loving the gifts more than the Giver. Forgive us, LORD, for treating the things you have entrusted to us as our own, when they really belong to you."

Thank God for Jesus! He succeeded where we all failed: He lived his life as a servant, even though He is the master. He was not greedy. He did not serve himself. He used all the earthly things his Father gave him in service of others. He even offered up his life for us, so that – through faith in Him – we might stand forgiven of all sin – including our sin of allowing money to become our god. Thank God for Jesus – because of Him we can live a new life of faithfulness toward God.

Part Two: But use it to make heavenly friends.

And how does Jesus want us to use money? Consider the following parable:

"There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. ² "So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'

Like the steward in this account, we have wasted on ourselves the blessings God has given us to use to his glory. God warns us that a day of reckoning is coming – when, as the Scriptures say: *each of us shall give account of himself to God.* (Rom 14:12 NKJV)

"Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg.

The steward was wise in that he took his masters warning seriously. Do we? The Scriptures testify that Jesus is coming soon to judge the living and the dead. Does this warning cause us to reflect, repent and change course?

The steward says: *I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'*⁵ *"So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'*⁶ *"And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So 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?'* *So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'*

Since he was in charge of the books, the steward's action were perfectly legal – just like today if the person you gave financial power of attorney to spent all your money. When the steward forgave debt, it was as if the master himself forgave it. This action cost his master a lot of money. We expect his master to be even more upset, but here is the surprise: *"So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.*

Now, let's be clear: Jesus is not condoning dishonesty. His point is this: if a thoroughly unrighteous man takes his master's warning so seriously that he changed his course of action, shouldn't we also? We have every reason to use gifts God gave us to benefit others. We are children of the light. The Gospel has illumined our hearts to the truth of Christ's forgiveness. We are loved by God. Don't we have all the more reason to shrewdly use the physical blessings God has given us?

"How?" you might ask. Well, Jesus tells us:⁹ *"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.*

What does this mean? Let me us another portion of Scripture to explain: Speaking about Judgment day, Jesus says that He will welcome the righteous by saying, *'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*³⁵ *'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;*³⁶ *'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'*³⁷ *"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?'³⁸ 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?'³⁹ 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'⁴⁰ "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' (Mat 25:34-40 NKJV) "*

How are we to use money? First of all God does NOT want us to take a vow of poverty and avoid money completely. God has entrusted us with the honor of being managers of his finances. Avoiding money would be refusing the honor God has graciously given you.

The proper way to use money is to see it as God's and use it the way God wants you to use it. Here's how: First of all, God wants you to take care of the body He has given you. You need food, clothes, shelter and rest so you can be a good steward of God's gifts. You also need to take care of your soul. God is happy when your use time and money to grow in faith.

God also wants you to help spread his Gospel to the world. How can you do this? By financially supporting your congregation; by giving money to mission and the educational agencies of our synod. By doing this, you will be making sure future generations will have pastors and teachers who can lead others to Christ.

Feed and clothe those who can't feed and clothe themselves. Be ready to use the money God entrusted to you to help all in need – and not merely with the “spare change” you have left over from spending on yourself. No, the money you have is not yours – it's God's. Charitable giving and Gospel outreach should receive top priority when it comes to budgeting the use of money God entrusted to your care. On the other hand God doesn't expect the poor to give all their money away. He also understands that the rich share God's wealth by creating jobs and opportunities of business.

But this may lead you to ask some other questions like, how much money does God want me to give to Church? How much should I save for charity? How much can I spend on myself for life's little luxuries? These are all questions that I cannot answer for you, because each person and each situation is unique. But I can tell you this: The LORD wants us to give from the heart because He loves a cheerful giver who trusts that He will provide all you need no matter how much you give away. There are many examples of stewardship in the Bible you could look to as you plan to manage God's wealth. But the best advice I can give you is this: Look at the cross and remember God's love for you. Understand the mercy and resolve God exhibited to save you. Remember the LORD's promise to provide for your every need and bring you safely into His heavenly home? Let these things motivate you to be a faithful steward of the Lord's gifts and guide your decision as how best to use the wealth He has entrusted to your care. Be shrewd with the Unrighteous Mammon. Don't let money make you an unrighteous steward, rather use money to make heavenly friends. Amen