

TRINITY IX (AUGUST 1, 2021) – LUKE 16:1-13

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

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

Amen.

“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. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. 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...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.” Thus far our text.

At first, this text is very confusing. It seems as if Jesus is commending the shrewd manager for “protecting his own skin”, so to speak, and giving himself a secure future in the likely event that he loses his job as the manager. Rather than condemning the man for being so selfish, Jesus says that he will be given even more, and that those who do not strive to “get ahead” will end up with less. This isn’t the way that we have come to expect Jesus to speak! We would think that He would condemn the sinful manager, and urge him to repentance for his many sins. However, Jesus takes this opportunity to point out the difference between the ways of this world and the ways of the world to come. Those whose focus is on the earth and temporal things indeed worry

about money and position, power and possessions. They are concerned whether or not they will have enough money to get by, and thus spend all of their time on this “pursuit of happiness”. On the other hand, those whose trust is in God are not shrewd in these ways, and may indeed have to suffer in this life. However, those whose focus is on God in Christ Jesus will receive their reward in heaven – eternal life with God; while those whose focus is on earthly things will receive their reward here on earth, where moth and rust can destroy! Thus, even though it seems as if Jesus is siding with the shrewd manager in our parable, He is actually condemning the sins of the world that we live in, and pointing out that there is a fundamental difference in perspective between the two groups of people.

Money is not necessarily a bad thing – if used with the proper perspective. There are many temporal affairs that the church needs to take care of to keep going in the temporal sphere. For example, utility bills, insurance payments, and other such things need to be paid for in order for the congregation to continue to conduct services in the house of God. Also, money can be used to fund the things of God. Evangelism endeavors require a certain amount of fiscal spending in order to get done. Both at the local and Synod level, advertisements need to be purchased from secular media outlets, and will not be aired or printed without proper payment. Even down to the elements for Holy Communion – some money is still required in order to purchase them for use in the church. Money can be used for good purposes – in fact, sometimes it is for a good purpose that it is spent. The same is true in each of our lives, when we use the blessings of financial wealth to support our own families’ needs, as well as aiding in the helping of

others. Just because it is connected to a spiritual goal doesn't mean that we can't use earthly gifts that God gives us to accomplish it.

In fact, we are given money as a gift of God. This is one of the ways in which He blesses us every day. It is important to remember, however, that the gift of money is one of many ways that God provides for our needs. He supports our body and life, and gives us everything that we need and even more. He gives us the gift of work, not only to keep us out of the troubles that are incumbent with idleness, but also they allow us to purchase food and clothing, and other necessities of life. This gift of a job also allows us to help out others who are in need. Giving to the church and to other charities is a way that God uses the gifts He has given us of financial blessings to help others. Giving to those who we become aware of their need on a one-to-one basis is a way for us to spread around the blessings that God has given us as well. We must remember that all things come from God, and they are not birthed of our own works.

Money is not a bad thing; it is the "love of money" that is wrong. If we focus on the blessings that God gives to us, and the abilities that He has given us, then we are fine. However, if we start thinking that we are earning money, and are independent of Him, and we exalt ourselves for giving to others rather than God for providing the means and the impetus, then we get into trouble. We start going down the road toward the way of the world that Jesus speaks of in this parable. We become "shrewd" in the ways of this world, rather than focused on the ways of heaven to come. We forget the Giver of the gifts, and focus on the gifts and our use of them. Nowhere is this more tempting than with charitable giving. It is too easy to think that if we are giving to the church, we are satisfying our conscience, or think that we will get some eternal benefit from it. This is

NOT the case! Rather, God loves a cheerful giver – He wants us to give out of love, not out of obligation. Money can be used for the purposes of God; however, often it is not. That doesn't make money bad, or saving money a bad thing. Just because we corrupt a gift of God doesn't make destroy the gift. Rather, what we need to do is to pray that He would give us the urging toward repentance, and the forgiveness that follows. We pray that He would draw us closer to Him, and increase our reliance on Him, Who is stronger than we are even on our strongest day!

But, what happens if our perspective on money gets messed up? We end up like the shrewd manager, and lose our position. We may be given more things of this world, but possibly at the expense of the things of the world to come. Have you ever noticed how most of those who have a lot of money have had to give up other things along the way. Often, time with family, leisure time, or time at church suffer or have to be sacrificed before the god of money. This isn't always the case, but often is. Most churches have a problem with not having enough money to do the things they would like to do to spread the Gospel. It's not that God is stingy in His giving, but that He encourages us to be prudent in our spending. We must remember that our end-all goal is to spread the Good News in whatever ways we can think of, rather than making sure that the church is a profitable institution.

If our perspective on money gets messed up, we end up like the foolish man who built a bunch of barns to house his storehouse of crops, and then the next day died before he was able to spend any of his abundance. Many people put off pleasure with their family until some time in the future when they will have enough financial security to be able to take some time off. But, often by the time this happens, their health is such that

they can't enjoy the time with their family, or the children have grown up and moved away, or any of a host of other things. The ways of this world (to be secure financially) look appealing, but that's sometimes all that it is – good on the surface. God works in us to change our hearts of stone to realize this, and to trust Him above all other things, including our perceived “self-sufficiency.” This isn't to say that we should all desire to be paupers, but that we shouldn't let the desire for worldly possessions override our Christian faith. It is not wrong to be rich; but it IS wrong to desire to be rich over and above our desire to please God. Remember the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> commandments about coveting? What about the first commandment that speaks of fearing, loving and trusting God above all things. God works in us to remind us of these commands, and gives us the power to keep them amidst the temptations of the world surrounding us.

God promises us something much better than worldly wealth – the blessings of heaven and the world to come. God gave of Himself as a ransom for all men. He gave us more than a million dollars – He gave us eternal life. He gave us freedom from the pain, suffering and death that our sins deserve. He didn't act selfishly and shrewdly – otherwise, He would have abandoned us in our sins. Rather, He acted in a way that the world doesn't understand. He gave selflessly, not looking out for Himself, but for us. Because He has given us so many of these eternal blessings, the worldly goods that we once strove so strongly for don't seem to matter as much anymore, do they? When compared to eternal life in heaven with God, the world that we live in just doesn't hold a candle! Even those things that we spend oodles of money on are going to pass away eventually. Some things take longer than others, but at the end of the world, all of them

are going to be gone. They were all created by God, and they will be destroyed by Him at the end of the world.

God's love is so strong that He doesn't abandon us to our love of goods of this world; rather, He sent the Savior to atone for these sins of ours. As a result of His love for us, our love, birthed by Him, is so strong, that it empowers us to be generous to others, just as He is generous toward us. We give as we have been given; love as we have been loved; serve as we have been served, etc. Because of His great love, we are not destroyed or corrupted by the sinful world we live in – we are restored to health in Him. All that is left for us to do is to praise Him, and He even gives us the impetus to do that.

The shrewd manager in our story fits in well with many success stories that we hear on the television, most clearly in shows like “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous”. We often wonder what it would be like to have all of the money and wealth in the world, and “not have to worry about a thing.” Jesus tells us that the way of this world would indeed have us worry about these things, and forget about the world to come in heaven. However, He also reminds us that the things of this world are temporal, but the things in heaven are eternal. We cannot serve both God and money – we will either hate God and love money, or we will love God and not serve money. We are given the gifts of possessions by God to provide for our daily needs, and to be able to help out our brothers and sisters when they are in need as well. Money is not a bad thing, and we Christians can use it in God-pleasing ways. However, when we trade the use of money for the love of money, then things go downhill in a hurry! God doesn't want us to be like the shrewd manager; rather, He is pointing out the difference between the perspective of this world

and the perspective of the world to come. We are to learn from this parable what we are being saved from by Christ's sacrifice – a world of “striving to get ahead”, and a “dog eat dog” existence. Thanks be to God that He did not abandon us in our sins, but came to us when we could not come to Him, and loves us more than we can even comprehend. He knows we are sinful and unclean, but gives us abundant gifts anyway. All that we can do is thank and praise Him, the giver of all good gifts. Amen.

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

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.