

THE LORD BLESSES FAITHFUL SERVICE

Luke 16:1-13

TEXT: *Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg-- I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' "'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. "The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' "'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. "He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' "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. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? "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.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

One of the most frustrating things in doing the Lord's work is to manage the affairs of a congregation in a world that measures success with tangibles. Generally, whether there is a product or not, there must be a profit. But when Jesus says: ***My kingdom is not of this world...*** Jn 18, we must expect that doing the Lord's work will not be done nor measured in the same way as the world does its business. Jesus also said: ***The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*** Jn 3 If we would measure a "product" in the form of human souls saved, here again we will be frustrated since we cannot see where faith is or when it is being created in the human heart. Yet the Lord declares: ***....my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*** Is 55 The work of the Church is under the command and power of the Lord, our Master in this "business" of doing the work of the church.

So what are we, the Lord's servants, to do? Paul writes: ***Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*** 1Co 4:2 Before us is such an emphasis: THE LORD BLESSES FAITHFUL SERVICE I. Faithful servants know whose property it is that they manage; and II. Faithful servants manage the Lord's blessings wisely.

I. It is truly a strange parable that Jesus sets before his disciples in teaching this truth, and it's one that has been subject to many interpretations and misinterpretations. You heard the details of the criminal behavior of this dishonest servant who was unfaithful with his masters property, wasted it, and then lied, cheated and stole in order to

save him. Let it be enough to say that Jesus isn't teaching His Church to act like this in the world. The point that serves our understanding is in what the master says about his lying and cheating servant: ***The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.*** In other words, "I have to hand it to this criminal -- he's a sharp cookie."

Why? It's a fact that the unbelievers of this world love their god, which is self and the money that makes oneself happy so much that all they do is work for themselves and for all the money they can get. Jesus says: ***...the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.*** Why is this? In the eyes of the world, teaching the little children of this congregation about Jesus is indeed less important than teaching them about math and science. Better to teach them how to make money, how to play sports and learn instruments. Better to give them a better life than what we had as children and the best education the world has to offer. But Sunday School? Lutheran Elementary School? Bible Classes? And worship with the congregation every Sunday? But the world is not wise, nor is it of God.

But because we also have the sinful nature, we also buy into the ways of the world very easily. That's why we Christians wrestle with the warning of Jesus: ***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.*** What would our congregation be today if the true devotion of every one of us were God and not the money He has graciously given us? They call it "discretionary spending." It refers to the money that is left after all financial responsibilities are met. What's left is for us to spend non-essentials. Ask yourself: "What percent of my offerings to the Lord fall under "discretionary spending?" Are they from what I have left over? Or are they from the category defined by Paul when he counseled the Corinthians: ***On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...*** 1 Co 16, and Jesus who said: ***... seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*** Mt 6 Because we have a sinful nature, God's Word must remind us: ***...the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.*** Why

How can we be shrewd managers as ***the people of the light?*** Remember what it is that we have to manage and whose property it is that we are called to manage. We have in our hands the Means of Grace. We have the Gospel, which ***is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe...*** We have the forgiveness of sins, not only for ourselves, but for all who repent. The product we have is the invisible truth of man's forgiveness, which is ours by faith alone, and received by faith alone by hearts that hear us proclaim this forgiveness through the crucified and risen Christ Jesus. So does anyone think for a second that if the Lord has given us these gifts, He will not also give us the earthly means to use these gifts?

How does anyone measure the product of God's power and grace delivered by faithful Christians faithfully telling others about the Lord? You and I will NEVER know the success of God's Word at this location until each of us go to heaven ourselves. There we will see who the believers are! But while we ARE HERE, let us pray that we manage this property of the Lord wisely.

II. Then Jesus told His disciples: ***I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.*** To do

the work of preaching the Gospel in this world will require money and the wise use of it. Jesus said: ***I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.*** Those who hear the Gospel and believe it become our friends and fellow members of God's Kingdom. And when the End comes everything's gone, we will be surprised at how many are in heaven to welcome us because of our witness and faithful preaching and teaching.

But while we are here, the money and property God gives to each of us is given to us for us to manage. Is it in stained glass windows? Pipe organs? Parking lots and a school? No, it is in invisible souls. But let us be careful that we do not take for granted what the earthly blessings Lord has given us for the purpose of elevating the Gospel to its highest position! Compared to souls, this entire worship facility is nothing. Yet it is from the Lord who reminds us: ***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. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?***

Notice that this text talks about money and the Church must ask for, use and manage money in order to carrying out Christ's ministry, at home and abroad. But how you use the money and property God has given you will be blessed by God only if you and I are faithful servants, remembering whose property it is that we are given to manage. And know for certain that when our Lord comes at the end of time, He who is the Creator of all things, He who has blessed us with enough worldly wealth to build this beautiful church, maintain it all these years, support the ministry of the Word since 1890 and a Lutheran Elementary School since 1983, will take NONE of this with Him into His Kingdom. In fact, our Lord Himself will be burning it all down for eternity. But the invisible souls that have passed through these doors all these years, that were baptized at this font and who later kneeed before the Lord for His Holy Supper, will be raised to life and taken to heaven.

If the Lord should come today, how blessed you are to have been counted among the Lord's faithful people! Amen.