

Parable of the Shrewd Manager

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[0 : 00] As we stand, let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your gospel. We thank you for the gift of heaven. And we pray that you help us to use our resources to honor you in heaven.

By your Holy Spirit, open your word to us and bring us your encouragement and your comfort. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Well, it's great to have the children in the service again with us today, as we have all throughout the month of August.

And I wonder, raise your hand, children, if you have a children's Bible, a Bible with pictures in it, nice pictures that tell the stories of the Bible.

Okay, there's a few of you that do. My son Alexander has a few Bibles as well that have been given to him. And I was going through them when I read this Bible reading to prepare for this sermon.

And I realized that in all of his Bible books, including a book on parables, you can't find this parable for some reason. You can't find the parable of the shrewd manager.

[1 : 21] In fact, one of the Bibles is an everyday Bible. And it has Luke going all the way up to Luke 15, and then it starts again in Luke 17 and keeps going.

So we have this missing page for some odd reason. Well, of course it's because it's a bit of a shocking story that we've heard. The main character, the hero, is a dishonest steward.

And he gets caught using his master's money for his own personal gain. And he's going to be fired soon, as soon as he writes down accounts of all the things that he did with the money.

Now, he only likes well-paying, white-collar jobs. And so he gets the bright idea of making friends for when he is unemployed, so he can actually stay with them and live with them.

And he reduces all their debts that they owe his boss without the boss's permission. And then at the end, the master actually commends this dishonest steward for his shrewd business times.

[2 : 27] And that's the end. Well, we might think, you know, if we want to raise our children to be managers in Enron or something like that, this is a good story.

But is it something that we actually want to train our children in? Well, when you look at the passage closely and spend time with it, you are able to see the point that's absolutely crucial for anyone who's going to follow Jesus.

And that is that he wants us to use our money in such a way that prepares for the day when our money will mean nothing.

You remember the story of the rich fool that Jesus told that we preached on a few weeks ago? Well, the thing that happened with the rich fool is that he failed to reckon with the failure of his wealth.

But this man used the money at his disposal to prepare for that day by making friends who might give him a place to stay when he's fired. And that is what is the point of this story that Jesus says.

[3 : 36] And he applies this story by saying, if anyone follows me, make heavenly friends with your money because it will fail you one day. And Jesus is calling us to be faithful with the money that we have.

He calls us to resist trying to serve two masters, God and money, and instead serve one master since you can't serve both. And Jesus says the way to do it is this story, is to follow the example in some way, not the dishonesty, but the shrewdness of preparing for the day that you won't have money.

And I want to look at three things that are actually very good about this dishonest steward because this is what Jesus is asking us to take away from it.

The first thing is that this steward was a steward. Jesus chose that position for a reason in this story. And that is to remind us that we are stewards of all the things that God has given to us.

Everything on heaven and earth is the Lord's. And we are simply those who take care of it, who have been entrusted with this money. The steward in this story is one who actually wasted his goods in verse 1.

[5 : 00] He wasn't a good steward. And that word waste is the same word that is used in the prodigal son who takes his father's inheritance and wastes it, or squanders it.

And it's when the charges are brought against this guy that he realizes that he has ignored his job description. He has ignored his role of being a steward.

And it's brought to him with force, and it's brought to us with force, what a steward actually is meant to do and be. Now the Bible is very clear that we are stewards as well.

The Bible is also clear that like the steward, we often, we are tempted to forget our role. We easily assume that wealth and talent is our own.

And there's a temptation to squander it on ourselves, forgetting about who the real owner is. And you see this right at the beginning of the people of God. Do you remember when the people of God went into the promised land?

[6 : 03] Just before they went, Moses gave them a very important talk about spiritual danger. He starts the talk by saying, be careful. And he says this in Deuteronomy 6, Be careful when you become wealthy, building fine houses and settling down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and gold increase.

You may say to yourself, my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. But remember, the Lord your God, for he is the one who gave you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your fathers, as it is today.

You see what this parable is doing for us? It is helping us out of spiritual danger. It is helping us to remember, to remember that all is God's.

Every bit of what we have that is good belongs to him. And that's why in the prayer book, as there's the offering during communion, there is a prayer that is said, and it's actually a prayer from David, from 1 Corinthians 29.

And it says this, it says, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel, all that is in the heaven and the earth is thine. All things come from thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.

[7 : 30] Well, that prayer needs to be our prayer, so that we remember. That prayer is the prayer that reminds us of our role. We are stewards. We are people who have been entrusted with much, just as that steward was.

Now the second thing about this guy that's very good in his experience for us to know is that he came up against, and he realized that there was a day of reckoning in the near future for him.

There was a day when he was going to be fired, all his belongings would be taken away, he wouldn't even have a place to live. He would have a very different life, and he didn't know what it would look like.

And so all of these meant that he had to make important decisions. And that's true for us as well. Because in Jesus' resurrection, when we came into faith in Jesus, we were coming to faith in one who not only rose from the dead, but will come again for us one day.

We say it every day in the creeds, don't we? I believe that Jesus will come in glory to judge the living and the dead. It is a day that was talked about in the last chapter when we are received home with joy to the Heavenly Father.

[8 : 50] There is a celebration about that. But it is also a day when our earthly wealth will be taken away. And in that new heaven, that place of joy, the earthly values that we have today will be taken and turned right upside down.

We will not enjoy things that money can buy. Instead, we will enjoy God. We will glorify Him forever. Money will not come into the picture anymore.

And this was a theme of Jesus' teaching. The kingdom of God is near. Change the way that you look at your values and the things that you hold as wealthy. Where your heart is, that's where your treasure will be.

And I believe that if we want our vitality and our joy as Christians to deepen, that's something that needs to be in the front of our minds every day.

That there is a day when a new heaven and a new earth will come for us. And that day may come very, very quickly. We realize in a day like today that life is fragile.

[10 : 03] That it is something that is fleeting, that can end in a moment. And in a moment, we will see the glory of the kingdom of God. At that moment, we will be in the presence of the Holy God, our Heavenly Father.

And that thought means a change in our priorities. A massive shift, just like what happened with the dishonest steward. A change in the way that you do business, in the way that you relate to people, in the way that you look at your life.

There is a sudden change. And that ought to be our situation, the same that the steward was in. Now the third and last thing I want to point out about this guy, is not only does he realize that his money is not his own, again, and not only does he know that there is a day very soon when it is taken away, but he actually takes action.

He uses his master's money for that day, so that people would think well of him. And this is something that brings the point of the parable home for him, for us as well.

Because if you notice in verse 4, there's actually a sense of joy in making this decision for the steward. All of a sudden he says, I decided what to do so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.

[11 : 29] You know, there should be an exclamation point at that point. What he is doing is he's saying, I'm going to summon the master's debtors, and whatever they owe the master, I'll give a considerable discount to and write them new IOUs.

And the result of this is that the debtors will think well of me, but also the debtors will think well of the rich man, the master, as well.

And that's the shrewdness that the master praises in verse 8. There's not much you can do about it. He's not praising the guy for being dishonest.

He's still firing the guy. But he's looking at the situation, he's saying, you have to hand it to the guy. He is at the end of his rope, but he's very resourceful. He thinks ahead.

He's losing all his money, and he's able in a short time to actually plan for that future and make everybody look good. And so at the end of the parable, Jesus leaves something with us, the hearers.

[12 : 32] He says, look at that guy, the steward. He says, the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generations than the sons of light are at dealing with their own generation.

He's saying, you and I need to have that kind of foresight. Like that steward, we need to realize that our money is not our own, that there's a day when the money is taken away, and that we need to actually act with our money.

It's amazing how often in the Bible Jesus talks about money, but here is the chance for action that Jesus is giving to his disciples and basically says, do something with your money.

Verse 9, make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous mammon. In other words, money that comes from the wealth of this unrighteous world so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal habitations.

And there's the point of this parable. It's not my teaching to you this morning, it's Jesus' teaching to us. He says, use your money to make friends in heaven. It's an interesting teaching that often we don't hear about.

[13 : 45] It's very interesting that right now we live in a time when the most wealth in the history of humanity is changing hands from one generation to another generation.

And so, every day there are decisions being made, big decisions, about what one generation will do with their wealth. And the thought that comes up most often is, what is the best good?

What is the most good that I can do with this inheritance? What is the best good? How will people think well of me is the question that's often asked as well?

And this is a situation that we actually experience in our own lives because we are extraordinarily wealthy in our culture. And Jesus is saying, how will you pass that on?

How will you get people to think well of you through your money here on earth? Well, Jesus doesn't explain exactly how. It's a tough question.

[14 : 52] How are you going to use your money to make friends in heaven? So you have to come up, and when I was thinking this through, you have to come up with what people will be about in heaven. What is the experience of people in heaven?

A good place to look is the book of Revelation. And in there, you see what people in heaven are like. they are people who have persevered in following Jesus.

And I want to say that a lot of the ministries at St. John's are about helping people to persevere in following Jesus. The Bible studies that we are about, when people are involved in pastoral care, in conversations together as a church, supporting each other, you are helping people to persevere in following Jesus.

There will also be people who come to faith through the gospel of Jesus. And again, many ministries here at St. John's that we support with our money help people to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

You know, there's the ministry of discovering Christ. There's the Bible adventure camp. There are times of training for people to be evangelists. There's also a mission that we're going to have in the middle of November that we are working hard on.

[16 : 10] That many ministries at St. John's will be focused on bringing people who don't know Jesus to actually come to know him one day. I think he already knows Jesus.

And thirdly, there will be people who will be healed of psychological and spiritual and physical brokenness. You know, the activity of heaven will be the activity of healing.

Healing is the first thing that you hear about in heaven. And there are ministries in this church that involve healing. Healing that is physical in prayer for people who are ill.

Healing for people who have experienced emotional brokenness, like the ministry of living waters or divorce care or grief share. There are many pastoral care times when there is healing that's brought simply through a visit of a friend.

These are ministries that are supported through the finances of the church. And finally, what you see in heaven is people who know the joy of communion with each other in Jesus Christ.

[17 : 18] Now, at the back of the church, I know there's going to be an announcement like this, but I'm sort of preempting it. There's all kinds of very fresh donuts that are going to be sold out there. And there's actually a reason for that.

it's pointing to this Harambe festival, a festival of celebrating our communion with one another, but also our communion with another diocese in Malawi, Africa.

It celebrates the fact that we can actually bring goodness to a people that are Christians halfway across the world and that we can also help bring healing, especially physical healing, to them.

There is this joy of communion that comes by being able to gather together in times of celebration, like weddings and so forth. It's also a place in the church which is supported by finances where we gather together to comfort each other.

There is a time that brings great healing at being in one another's presence, which we will do on Friday at Fran Robinson's funeral. This is only made possible, this time of communion, of being together, by the fact that we are committed to one another financially, that we are able to gather together in a place in the name of Jesus Christ and to hear his gospel and to be changed by it.

[18 : 39] And you see, what we're about here is the beginning of a work that will be completed in heaven. And so when you give money to the ministry of a place like St. John's or your own church if you're not from here or to ministries of the gospel outside churches, you are actually supporting the work of heaven.

You are actually working towards what will happen in heaven with people who are experiencing the healing of God, the persevering of ending up with Jesus, of coming to faith in the gospel, and of being joyful in communion together.

This is what we pray God will help us with, that he will help us be faithful with our money to prepare us for the true riches of heaven. Because when you go to heaven, you will see perfectly finished the work that you have supported here on earth.

And you will be thought of well in heaven. If God grant to us, each of us, that kind of strong vision of the future, may he grant us generosity to prepare for it.

That is a legacy that is truly eternal. That is a legacy that will never end. Amen.