**Why Commend Dishonesty?**

**Luke 16:1-13**

Trinity IX – 08.14.2022

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

Would you say that what the manager did with his master’s belonging was dishonest? Would consider it a form of stealing? Do you believe that in today’s world such should be thrown in jail? Isn’t it amazing how this is so clear, but when it comes to other issues which the Scripture teaches very clearly, we are confused?

Many are certainly more in tune with the world than with God’s Word and God's will!

We wonder how the master can commend the manager/steward for what he has done? How can Jesus, in telling this parable commend him? What does it all mean?

You have heard this text on numerous occasions, probably as the basis for a stewardship sermon? In such cases, the parable Jesus told was probably overlooked or glossed over, and they skipped to the last portion of the text to the comparison of worldly and eternal riches. You were told not to love mammon and, to love God more, and to trust Him.

If you fear, love, and trust in God above all things – you recognize that all you have is God’s first, you are simply a steward, a manager, of His gifts to you.

If you fear, love, and trust in God above all things – then your offerings will come first.

If you fear, love, and trust in God above all things – they you will tithe, you will give God 10% off the top, a first fruits gift back to God of what He’s given to you. It is not yours to begin with, you are only returning what is God’s to the work of His kingdom.

You know what, all those things are completely true. But you already know all that! If you are not tithing, repent and do so.

However, that does not answer your problem with the text. This dishonest manager is called shrewd by his master – by Jesus Himself. How can this be? He is shrewd, for he understands the world and his master better than Christians understand their master – God.

Do Christians ***TRULY*** understand the gracious nature of God? Even if they do, do they ***act*** on that belief? Or do they act as if God is some unmerciful master, as if God does ***not*** have an **eternal** plan for them?

We should act on what we know to be true about God as it has been very clearly revealed to us in Christ Jesus. We should be generous with what He entrusts into our care, for as stewards of His gifts, He will give us far more than we need. ***And,*** we should expect His forgiveness, and so come to him in repentance, expecting great things from Him.

This is what Jesus is teaching in our text. Jesus commends dishonest manager for his shrewdness. He understands his master. He sees the merciful and gracious nature of his master who did not throw him in jail for embezzlement, but only fired him. Knowing the gracious nature of his master, he boldly acts upon what he ***knows to be true*** about his master.

He acts to gain things in this world and life. He does not wipe out debts completely, that would have been going a bit too far – he is shrewd.

In fact, He may have actually ***helped*** his former master. By reducing the debts, the master may at least get **some** money out of those who had not paid anything in ages.

But how could the master have responded like that? Look at the evidence. You can almost hear the boss come thundering into the office to speak to the manager. He is a stern man! This is a strict set of circumstances! He comes in and says, “What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager. You are fired. I want complete records of everything you have done.”

In today’s world, his keys would have been taken away, his access to all accounts on the computer frozen, access passwords changed, and he would have been immediately walked to the outside doors

But in this case, he is sent back to his office. There, he massages the bills so that others will benefit. He makes friends with those out in the world. Only then does he close out the books and hand them over.

For this, the master commends him for his shrewdness.

He is not commended for his honesty.

He did not even make any money for himself.

He made friends with the world.

He knew how the world would treat him, so he did what he was able to do to be accepted by others in the world.

Going into the world – he acted worldly.

He sought his own benefit by manipulating others.

He acted shrewdly for he knew that his master would be gracious to him.

His master had already shown his merciful side, so the manager exploited that in order to be accepted by the world.

How do you act? You have another kingdom in which you live, but do you act with the same eagerness and zeal in the pursuit of it? Do you seek eternal things with the same zeal with which the children of the world seek those things that will not even last in this world – goods, money, fame, and power – all things which will fade once death claims us?

How much time do you spend in pursuit of the things of the world and this life? Do you expend the same effort to attend to things of the kingdom to which you do belong, God’s kingdom, and to your souls? Do you ***know*** your Master? Do you ***trust*** Him? Do you ***know*** His grace and mercy to you?

God loves you so much He did the most amazing thing ever done in all of recorded history. He did something which most people do not believe, for it is so unbelievable.

Jesus trusted the Father so much, that He gave His own life into His hands. He suffered and died for your lack of trust of God.

Christ died to purchase your forgiveness for putting the world ahead of Him.

Christ purchased everlasting riches with His own precious blood, shed for you.

It is these riches that He desires to give you.

How well do you make use of these true, everlasting riches? Do you begin each day in God’s kingdom – in Word and prayer? Do you regularly remember your Baptism, giving thanks to the Lord that you have already died the second death and He has given you eternal life? Or do you regard your baptism as just a part of your history but which has little relevance to you now?

Do you eagerly hear the Absolution, knowing that it is the Lord’s forgiveness, that it is His promised gift of salvation? Or do you regard His grace as a safety net? You know, forgiveness is there after you decide which sins will be useful to you in the coming week. Or maybe you think you have heard enough of forgiveness to last a while – preachers should tell you how to live and get off the forgiveness kick – as if somehow you will somehow do better if you have more than ten commandments. In other words, you have no desire to hear more of the Lord’s love for you.

Do you take the time to prepare for the Lord’s Supper, marveling that the Lord God of Sabaoth visits you, to serve you His very own body to eat and His precious blood to drink? Or is His Supper an interruption to your daydreaming during the service– you have to get out of your pew, come forward, and kneel for the distribution – you do it because everybody else does it. Do you take seriously the truth that those who are unprepared will receive this Communion to their judgment? Or, have you set aside that Word of God for the sake of appearing more agreeable to the world?

Among us – indeed in all the world, there is no one righteous—not even one. We are far from faithful stewards of what our Lord entrusts to us. And sadly, we are probably more careful with worldly mammon than we are with the Word and Sacraments – our most precious possessions – that which bestows righteousness and eternal life.

Even now, as the baptized people of God, you and I are still unrighteous stewards who waste what our Lord commends to our use. We deserve nothing but God’s wrath.

But look at how your merciful Lord treats you. Although you often take His means of grace for granted and treat them shabbily, He does not relieve you of your stewardship. From now until the Last Day, He keeps you as His stewards. He wills that you continue to make use of His means of grace, so that through them He might forgive you for the sake of Christ Jesus.

Furthermore, He wills that you use them to erase (completely—not just half!) the debts of others. As you encounter sinners who are burdened with the load of killing sin, do not tell them to erase half the debt and get on with life.

No, you proclaim to them the Word. Tell them that Christ has died for all of their sins—not half, not most—He died for ***ALL***. You give our Lord’s grace out to all who will receive it. Does our Lord grow angry that you give out His grace so freely? Certainly not! He commends this as the mission of His Church. “Freely you have received,” He declares; “freely give” (Mt. 10:8).

How abundant and excessive is the Lord’s mercy for you! Because His Law demands a level of righteousness you cannot not muster, He became flesh, gave the accounting and suffered the judgment for your sin so that you might be forgiven. He continues to pour out His grace upon you by His Word and Sacrament, proclaiming you righteous for His sake—by His work, not by your own.

While this parable is about the Lord and his mercy, there something to learn from the steward. Here it is: the steward’s entire scheme rested on his trust in his lord’s mercy. If his master was not merciful, he would have had the steward thrown out ***immediately***, imprisoned or killed for using his goods to his own advantage. But the steward used the lord’s things to make friends, trusting that the lord would commend, and not punish, him.

By the grace of God, trust in your Lord’s mercy. Confess your sin and unrighteousness to Him, trusting that He who gave His own life to redeem you, will continue to save you now.

And so He does.

Your Lord commends you today with these words, “You are saved by My mercy this day, because I have accounted for your sin with My own flesh unto death on the cross. I declare you righteous, forgiven all of you sins. Go in peace.”

In the name of Jesus. Amen.