

Luke 16:1–13  
Trinity IX  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
July 28, 2024

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Our Gospel Lesson for this morning can be a stumbling block for many. What does Jesus mean by this story of the dishonest manager? Is Jesus commending dishonesty? Is He telling us to get ahead at all costs? Or that the ends justify the means? This Gospel story is often called the parable of the shrewd manager, based on our Lord's interpretation of His parable in verse 8: "The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." The word "shrewd" originally meant "evil in nature or character." Later, the word "shrewd" took on the characteristics found in this parable: cunning, resourceful. "Shrewd" takes on a more positive tone based on this parable. Is Jesus commending dishonesty? No, He's commending resourcefulness, or shrewdness.

The manager was blamed for wasting his master's possessions, so the master called him to account. The manager took the time he still had and made for himself friends by means of unrighteous wealth. He knew his weaknesses and his limits. This manager was too weak for manual labor and too proud to beg, so he devised a plan to make some friends. With some kind of authority still in his hands, the steward canceled the debts of his master's debtors left and right. He had his clients fudge the numbers to come out on top. He knew his time was short, so the steward redeemed the time. His job was all but lost, so he decided to go down fighting. He decided to make his own luck. He took a greater risk and sowed seed for a future harvest. Giving

deep discounts to the men who owed oil and wheat, the manager was hedging his bets and ensuring he'd be taken care of when his livelihood was taken away.

Surprisingly, the master commended the dishonest manager, not for his dishonesty, but for his shrewdness, for his cleverness. The master is praising the manager not for what he does, but relative to his tactics. This is the same way you might be impressed by an opponent. It's immoral and sinful to cheat, yet hard to be unimpressed by someone with enough skill to count cards. You can praise such a thief not for what he does, but relative to his tactics, to his cunning and prudence. The same goes with any sin or misdeed that's carried out in a clever way. You can be deeply disturbed by a wicked person's actions, yet impressed by their resourcefulness and dedication. The master still fired the manager, yet commended him for acting prudently.

What are the lessons Jesus would have us draw from this story? First, Christians, as sons of light, ought to be shrewd in their dealings. Second, what does that shrewdness look like? Jesus says: make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

In Matthew 10, Jesus sent out His disciples, saying: "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." The Christian life calls for wisdom, not the wisdom of this world, but the wisdom of God. In Luke 21, Jesus tells the disciples: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict." This divine wisdom from above is what makes you children of light. The LORD gives you the light from above in His Word, a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. He enlightens you. He illuminates this world, showing what it truly is and who you truly are: a sinner, but a redeemed sinner by the blood of Jesus Christ; a child of God born out of the waters of Holy Baptism. In Baptism you received enlightenment. That's why the early church

fathers called Baptism an “illumination” or an “enlightenment.” As a child of God, you see the world in a different light, in *the* light of the world, Jesus Christ. You learn to act wisely and prudently according to the Word of God, focusing on eternal salvation more than on temporal comforts. In the Light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome, you become children of light. As Jesus said to the crowds before His death in John 12: “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

In Jesus Christ, you are sons of light. But the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. What Jesus means here is that when you look at the way unbelievers behave, there’s often more vigor and more understanding of the goal. A child of this world will work diligently to go on vacation every summer and finally retire and enjoy a life of ease. That’s the simple goal of most people and they’ll work hard to achieve it. They’ll do whatever it takes to overcome the obstacles that would hinder them from achieving their goal of happiness in this life. The children of this world will study the best tricks for living your best life now and they will prudently save up to ensure a nest egg for the end of this earthly life. Christians, too, save up for a rainy day and that’s fine. But what about achieving spiritual goals? Where’s the diligence when it comes to repentance? Or studying God’s Word? Or storing up for yourselves treasures in Heaven by helping the poor? Someone’s true beliefs about the afterlife become apparent in how they spend their time and money here in time, on earth.

The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. The world pursues its desires with ardent devotion and skill while Christians are often unproductive and negligent when it comes to matters of the soul. Luther puts it this way: “it

takes twice the effort for the wicked to earn Hell than for the godly to gain Heaven.” Unbelievers work so hard and spend so much to gratify their Hellish desires while Christians, holding onto the promise of great blessings, often seem to hardly care. They don’t rush Heaven the way unbelievers rush Hell. Instead, Christians are tempted to take the riches we have in Christ Jesus for granted.

Why is this? It might be that unbelievers are seeking to reach a goal they can see. They know what pleasure and seeming fulfillment in this life looks like, so they’ll do anything they can to get there. But the destination they’re seeking is a mirage, a city that doesn’t exist. Anyone who thinks he has achieved what he was looking for quickly realizes the desire for more is never sated. If a person’s desires are only of this world, then when he gets what he wants he’ll only want more. You can’t have enough money, beauty, land, influence, or popularity. When you achieve your goal, you’ll soon realize that the actual goal is still just over the horizon. You’ll keep scrolling, looking for fulfillment that only makes your loneliness deeper. As St. Augustine famously prayed to the LORD: “Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.” Nothing in this world can satisfy what you need and long for the most. Only God can do that in Jesus Christ our LORD.

While the sons of this world frantically seek in vain to fill the God-sized hole in their heart with temporal goods, Christians seek the Kingdom of God that is above. But often, this Kingdom is difficult to detect. You can’t see it the way you see the things of this world. The Kingdom of God is invisible. It’s hidden from sight. “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:20–21). The end goal of Christians seems farther away than the end goal of the world. The world thinks it sees the finish line and runs hard for the goal, but

the finish line keeps moving. But the finish line for Christians is over the horizon. We know it's there because God's Word tells us about it. But we can't see it with our eyes, at least not yet. In this race, everyone is running for the prize. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable (1 Cor 9:25), a crown of glory. So don't run aimlessly. There is a goal, even if you can't see it. The goal is "the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14). The goal is the Kingdom of God itself, eternal salvation in Jesus Christ. Keep your eyes of faith on the prize. Keep your eyes on the cross.

What does this striving for the invisible and eternal Kingdom of God look like? You can see that striving visibly here in time. Jesus says: "make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." The children of this world focus only on the things of this life and then lose this life and Heaven. The children of light focus on eternity and in so doing are able to put the things of this world in proper perspective. Everything you have: your life, your wealth, time, family and friends, a good reputation, a well-paying job, all these things are gifts of God to be put to use for the Kingdom of God.

Don't live for these temporal things, but for the LORD. What that looks like in reality is putting everything God has given you to use for the Kingdom of God. Use your time to study the wisdom of God's Word. If you need a place to start, look at the wisdom of King Solomon in the book of Proverbs, and after that the book of Ecclesiastes. Then you'll learn how to orient your life towards the eternal. Use your time and resources to support the preaching of God's Word. Bring others to Jesus through your words and your deeds. Invite your friends and family into the Lord's house and use everything you've been given to reflect the love of Jesus. Everything in this life is passing away. Yet the LORD is working through you and through the things of this life

to lead other people to Jesus. Don't be stingy with the blessings God has given you. Use what you've been given to welcome others into God's house, and in eternity they will receive you into the eternal dwellings of the new heavens and the new earth. This world is passing away along with everything in it, but the people you interact with everyday will live forever. Use your material goods for their eternal good.

The dishonest manager was commended not for his dishonesty, but for his shrewdness, for his cleverness. If the children of this world pursue their goals with the greatest resolve, how could we children of light not pursue our goal of eternal life in Jesus Christ with the greatest resolve. Live in this world as those endued with the wisdom of God. He's given you warning, comfort, and exhortation about these eternal realities. Sit down and count the cost. Plan for the work ahead and trust in the LORD to see it through. And may the Holy Spirit grant you the eyes of faith and the wisdom necessary to see all things in the true light of Jesus Christ.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.