

September 18, 2016  
Luke 16:1-15

Proper 18c  
The Shrewd Manager

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

When reading this text, specifically the story that begins the text, you are probably thinking...hmm...that's odd. Commending someone for doing something that on face value looks dishonest at best, but most likely looks criminal. I read this text over and over, trying to pick it apart. There's one thing that you, me, and scholars who study texts for a living can agree on, this text is difficult, especially when it comes to this verse: <sup>8</sup>*The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.*<sup>1</sup> Even when we get to Jesus' explanation of the story at the end of our text, it still is a hard text to decipher.

Commending a shrewd, crafty, dishonest manager seems a bit out of place for Jesus to take this parable. This story of Jesus spoken to the disciples has a lot to speak to us and guide us in how we are to reach out to those that are in need...not just physical need, but spiritual need. Jesus tells us something else that is odd, <sup>9</sup>*And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.* <sup>2</sup> Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, when in His Explanation He says: *You cannot serve two masters...you cannot serve both God and mammon.* This unrighteous wealth is due to fail...it's going to break, burn up, rust, tarnish, and even die. But Jesus says, Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth.

You see, God gives you little things in life. He gives you very good gifts, He gives you your life and the blessings in your life to manage. Was the shrewd manager faithful in the little things? Not at first...He was dishonest. People brought charges against him to the master that he was being dishonest in his business dealings, but then He goes to the master's books after he's been fired, let go of his job. Knowing that He had not much hope, He asked each debtor what they owed their master, and he changed it in the records. Perhaps, the manager was giving up his portion that would have been paid to him if he had his job, or maybe it was out of selfishness so that he would have a place to stay. In thinking cleverly, shrewdly, he was thinking that his life would be taken care of, he would get into the homes of people he typically wouldn't. Perhaps even to bring the gospel to them. This shrewd manager became a friend with the debtor.

This sounds like St. Paul when you hear him write to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 9. <sup>19</sup>*For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.* <sup>20</sup>*To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Lk 16:8). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Lk 16:9). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

*<sup>21</sup> To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*<sup>3</sup>

St. Paul became friends to all, he became a servant of all, by using the little things in life, perhaps even the unrighteous wealth, the things that will eventually, spoil, perish, and fade. St. Paul became all things for all people. He became as a Jew, he became weak. Perhaps here he would take about becoming like the young family that lives in your neighborhood or the church neighborhood that has no church, that has no Jesus in their life. He might become like the elderly widow who mourns the loss of her husband and is questioning if God is really in her life. He would go into the lives of the people in order that by all things he might save some.

This sounds like what the shrewd manager is doing. Yes, he lost his job because he wasn't honest. He squandered his master's possessions. Was he cooking the books like he did to be commended...who knows, we aren't told and that doesn't matter.

Here Jesus is calling you to be faithful even with the "unrighteous wealth" that God has given to you. If you are faithful with the little things you can be faithful with much. You can be faithful with the message of the Gospel. However, if you squander and are dishonest with a little...you can't even be trusted with the message of the Gospel.

Jesus tells you that you cannot serve both God and mammon...but you can serve God with your mammon...with your wealth, with the things of this world in order to win those over for the Gospel. You can be a friend with fellow debtors in order to save them, using Paul's words, but knowing that it is Christ who saves, but you are the one who plants the seed and waters it. If you serve your mammon alone...you focus on yourself...you focus on your money, your lake homes, your careers, your academics, your athletics, your family, your church building and the fact that we are too small. They become God in your life. You begin to serve only those and you cannot be trusted with them...and therefore you cannot be trusted even with the Gospel message, the saving gifts of salvation.

Jesus tells you to serve God, to love him above everything else. He even commands you in the Sermon on the Mount to Love your neighbor as you love yourself. That's pure law. As you read in this text, you can use the very things God has given to you to become friends with those around you. You can use your money, your lake homes, your sports, your academics, your family, your church as a tool to become like one of those less fortunate people, both physically, emotionally, intellectually, but more importantly spiritually. As you form the friendship, as you

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (1 Co 9:19–23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

serve God by loving your neighbor, and using the very things God has given to you for their benefit, not just yours alone, you can be trusted with sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As I've read the bible, there are parts of the bible that get me to struggle. This text from Luke 16 is a text that I struggle with, to really understand what Jesus is saying...but those words from the sermon on the mount, Love your neighbor as you love yourself is a struggle. I have a hard time doing that. Sometimes I even have a hard time loving myself.

Jesus said it, he commands it of us. What is Jesus only loved us as He loves Himself. That wouldn't be good enough to save us. You see sometimes you and I are the debtors to the master. Sometimes, many times, all the times, we need to rest on the mercy of the Master...the one who is going to judge us at the end. Sometimes we are not faithful in the little things. Sometimes you and I are not faithful using the "unrighteous wealth."

Let me tell you this...Jesus love you more than He loves Himself, because He doesn't just skim your debt off the top, He pays for all of it. He pays all your debt. He not only is your judge...but He is also your Savior, the one who pays your debt, the one who suffers everything for you.

When you are the debtor, the one that can't even be faithful with a little bit, Christ Jesus is faithful, not just with a little, but with much, with everything. Christ Jesus is faithful for you! In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays, take this cup from me, find another way, Father...but not my will, yours alone be done. Christ Jesus went to the cross for you, because it was the will of the Father. He went to the cross for you because He loves you more than He loves Himself. Christ Jesus went to the cross for you because He is the merciful master! You can rest on His mercy and grace so that He takes your debt away and brings you into the eternal dwellings that He has prepared for you.

Because Christ was faithful in all things, because He loves you more than Himself, God raises Him from the dead for you. Christ Jesus lives again for you so that you may have life in His name. Christ Jesus gives through His life, death, and resurrection gives you His everything. He gives His life for you. Christ Jesus through His life, death, and resurrection, empowers you with the Holy Spirit so that you can use even the little things, the "unrighteous wealth," for His benefit, the benefit of the Kingdom...the benefit of your neighbor, the one who is also a debtor towards the master. You see your neighbor is also a debtor, your neighbor is one for whom Christ died and lives again, and you can be trusted with the Holy Spirit to give them Jesus, by knowing that you are a forgiven debtor!

In Jesus Name. Our Merciful Master. Amen.

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