
Luke 16:6-16. Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² 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.' ³ "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— ⁴ I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' ⁵ "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ "Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. "The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' ⁷ "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.' ⁸ "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. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. ¹⁰ "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. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? ¹³ "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."

Over the last few years much has been written with regard to generational research, specifically about the generation often referred to as Millennials (those born between 1980 – 2000). Among many different items and issues that make this generation unique, it has been noted how this generation is causing a shift in the way that a growing majority of our culture views and uses their wealth. Rather than seeing wealth merely as a tool for satisfying their own desires and material comforts researchers have found that many Millennials (especially individuals who had a high net worth) view wealth primarily as a vehicle for having a positive impact on the world.¹ Some researchers have also noted the trend that this generation wants and expects a church and its members to use their resources, be it time or money, to reach out and to help others.

Well, of course, it turns out that this is not just a new trend but rather this is actually the kind of thing that our Lord Jesus has always called his believers to do. However, we aren't always naturally that good at sharing our worldly wealth or being generous with our time and our treasures, and so our Lord with loving instruction points out our shortcomings in our management of his blessings and then teaches us how to use the blessings that he has given us, wisely and faithfully. He calls us his believers to use all that God has given us to be generous and to be good stewards. Especially as we consider the eternal riches that God has given us we are to help others and to be generous in the ways that we use our God-given earthly resources.

The parable of the shrewd or unfaithful steward is found in the midst of several parables dealing with - at least in part - the proper use of money. In the previous Parable of the Lost

¹ Oppenheimer Funds, "How Affluent Millennials View Wealth May Surprise You" www.oppenheimerfunds.com

Son, Jesus was addressing tax collectors and “sinners” as well as the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Through the parable of the Lost Son he tells of the forgiveness of the Father despite the wastefulness of the son. As Jesus now transitions to the parable of the Shrewd Steward our ears are pricked as we hear the words, “Jesus told his disciples.” With these words Jesus addresses specifically those who by faith are now saved and living in his grace. He instructs his disciples how to use our blessings wisely and faithfully. He is instructing us who believe in him how to be good stewards.

A steward has been defined as one who has been given the authority and the responsibility to handle the affairs of the state. In this case, the rich man has put his entire livelihood in the hands of another and has trusted that this man will use it wisely and faithfully. We get but a mere taste of the extravagant wealth of this master through the deals that this shrewd manager would make. We are told that one debtor owes about 875 gallons of oil that would be roughly the equivalent of what 450 olive trees typically produced, another was indebted for 1000 bushels of wheat, which would have been about the average that was produced on 100 acres of wheat fields. Again, this was just the amount that two debtors owed the rich man. One can only imagine the total wealth of this rich man.

This steward was entrusted with a great deal of wealth and a great responsibility, but the manager failed in carrying out his responsibility properly. The lesson says that this manager was ***“accused of wasting his (that is the rich man’s) possessions”***. We don’t know for sure if the manager was living extravagantly at his master’s expense or if he was just being lazy. But we can imagine that the rich man was disappointed to say the very least. The man that he had appointed to take care of his many possessions was neglecting the very important job that was entrusted to him. This unrighteous steward did not use his master’s wealth wisely. His eyes were diverted from his responsibilities that his master had entrusted to him and he was focused instead on the benefits that came from this position. He was wasteful and he no doubt used this position for his own good rather than for the good of the master.

We unfortunately have this in common with this unrighteous steward. God has entrusted to us an abundant number of blessings and we have been careless and wasteful. Much like this unfaithful manager our eyes often become diverted from our responsibility to our master, and have become focused on the very blessings that our master has given us. We live in a world where attention, our service, and honor is so often diverted away from the Almighty God as human beings serve the Almighty dollar. We live in a nation that for decades has encouraged the pursuit of wealth and passed it off as the new American dream. But it is not just a cultural thing, it is a personal thing because there is a part of each one of us, therefore, that is drawn to wealth. We are fascinated by the wealth that others acquire and we are trained to do what we can to gather up so wealth for ourselves. And because we are so drawn to wealth and money, our priorities are frequently tipped over and we give much more of our attention and even our love and trust to the gift instead the giver. We want more and more and we may carelessly use the wealth that God has given us with little regard for how he wants us to care for these blessings. We often fold our hands and pray that God would bless us with a profitable year or take away this or that financial burden, but how often don’t we forget to fold our hands and

genuinely thank him for the blessings that he provides? We don't give a second thought to ask our God to lead us and guide us in the way that we use these gifts that he has now given to us. We run off and take what he has entrusted to us for ourselves often neglecting the fact that God calls us to use that which he gives us wisely and he also commends and praises generosity.

In our lesson for today the rich man asks that unrighteous steward to give an account and to defend himself. The steward cannot, he knows he has been unfaithful and selfish. The time will come when our Almighty and just God will ask us to give an account, and we know that we have no defense. We too have been unfaithful and careless, wasteful and selfish. We deserve to be dismissed from the presence and the service of our master.

However, God in his mercy sent Christ Jesus to be our mediator. In his great love and care Jesus forgives our carelessness. Through Christ we are declared not guilty, and through Jesus we become rich for he has given himself up as a ransom for many. The debt that we have piled up by our sins our Savior has been washed away completely by a rushing flood of his grace. He has bought us back with his blood shed freely on the cross and has given us a receipt through his resurrection in order to assure us of our eternal reward. This reward is greater than any earthly treasure, and with riches that far exceed anything on earth.

Out of thanks for our Savior Jesus Christ we ought to praise him with our blessings for Jesus has set us free from the slavery of sin and greed so that we may now use our blessings faithfully, out of thankfulness to him. Our lesson seems to indicate that the master gave the manager some time to get his things together before he ultimately dismissed. During that time the manager would make some generous deals in order to make allies and friends to ensure that he was taken care of in the future. In the parable we see that the rich man commended the dishonest steward for acting wise. Jesus describes the scene in this way, ***"The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted shrewdly.... I tell you, use world wealth to gain friends so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."*** Now Jesus is not telling us to be dishonest with money that is not our own, or to swindle and steal so that we may gain friends here on earth. He is telling his believers this so that we can be generous in how we use our God-given blessings for an even greater purpose.

Our time of grace like the steward's time is short and we must make use of it. As believers our lives can be a daily visual sermon to those who do not believe. We have the opportunity to serve our God and proclaim what he has done for us in the way that we conduct our daily lives, even in the way that we handle our finances. In a world full of greed and thirst for wealth we can stand out as those who are honest, generous, and faithful. Out of thanks to God we can let our light shine by conducting our business with honesty and integrity. Out of thanks to be God we may also go about the every-day tasks of faithfully paying our bills promptly and keeping our finances in our order. Being responsible with the things that God has given us will often mean that we will have a healthy amount left over that we can use to be generous. This is pleasing to God, and then out of thanks to God we can use the abundance of blessings he has given us to be helpful toward others. We can use the blessings that God has given us to generously support ministry and outreach to our communities and throughout the world. We give our time and our money to support missions and outreach in our own

congregation. In this way we can make and keep friends and gain and maintain the respect of those people around us. Think of some of the ministries that we have taken on that have utilized our gifts as a congregation and our individual wealth to provide a need to others in the community. Think about the connections that we have made with families through soccer camp and Little Lambs Learning Center, many of those connections we would not have made if we had not been generous with these blessings that God has given us. To a world that is often chiefly concerned with earthly things these contributions are important.

Let us be careful how we handle our earthly blessings that God has given us so that may not lose the respect of those who are of this world. And let us be generous so that they may in turn respect the greater message that we have to give them, a message that we pray they may see as a message that transcends all earthly matters.

In the end however, it is much more than what others think or just a generational trend that leads us to live and give generously. It is remembering who it is that we serve. We gladly serve and praise our God. He has been so gracious and generous to us may he lead us to be generous especially as we reach out and help those around us and support the work of the church.

In explaining his parable Jesus refers to the people of this world as being very concerned with the things of this world. We see so many around us who eagerly pursue riches and rewards on this earth. The LORD reminds us, however, that we have been made people of the light through Christ Jesus. And as people of the light let us be as zealous for spiritual things as those of this world are zealous for the things of this world. Let us be zealously generous in our personal and congregational lives.

While there are plenty of people in this world blindly pursuing wealth there is also a growing number of the population that expects the church to use our wealth to help others and to reach out in the community. Instead of excessively storing up treasures for a rainy day may God bless us as we carry out ministry expressing clearly an ongoing trust in God, love for Jesus, and continual thanksgiving to the one who gives us all things. God expects us as his church and his disciples to share our earthly wealth to support the church so that the eternal riches of the gospel might be shared with others, let us do so gladly as a body and as individual believers.

We are doubly blessed because we can do this in the confidence that comes from faith because we know that our future is sure. Unlike the steward who didn't know what his future would hold, we know what the future holds for us. We know that through Christ our ransom has been paid, our debt has been forgiven and tremendous treasure is awaiting us in heaven. For this reason, we are no longer servants to our money, but rather we can serve God with our money. From time to time our eyes will again be diverted to the things of this world, but the LORD in his mercy sets his word before us so that we may look at the life God has laid before us, the opportunities for charity and service and ministry that God puts in front of us, and we can serve the LORD with thankful hearts and generous lives always knowing how generous God has been to us in Christ Jesus. AMEN