

The Shrewd Manager

Luke 16:1-13 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Now He was also saying to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering **his possessions**.² And he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’³ And the manager said to himself, ‘What am I to do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg⁴ I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.’⁵ And he summoned each one of his master’s debtors, and he began saying to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’⁶ And he said, ‘A hundred jugs of oil.’ (kc—a ‘jug’ is about 9 gallons). And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’⁷ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ And he said, ‘A hundred kors of wheat.’ (kc—a ‘kor’ is about 7.7 cubic feet). He *said* to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’⁸ And his master **complimented** the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.⁹ And I say to you, **make friends** for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it is all gone, they will receive you into the **eternal dwellings**.

¹⁰ “The one who is faithful in a very little thing is also faithful in much; and the one who is unrighteous in a very little thing is also unrighteous in much.¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true wealth to you?¹² And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?¹³ **No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”**

Introduction

One reality among the believers in America today: we pursue two things that we will never be able to catch at the same time. They are ‘money’ and ‘God.’ Jesus reminds us that we must choose one master to serve between God and money. Choose only one, He urges. However, many of us still try to pledge our loyalty to two masters making a futile effort to serve them both in our lives, despite Jesus’ declaration that no one can do that.

It's time for us to declare our undivided loyalty to either one of the two. Either we choose money and serve it. Or we choose God and serve Him. But never both. Many tried and none of them succeeded.

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Money or God?

I pray that all of us will choose God over money. Once you choose God, then your perspective on money and the practice thereof changes. Permanently. In fact, everything changes from 'me' and 'mine' to 'God' and 'God's.'

For instance, once we have chosen God over money, we will accept the truth that everything we possess is 'from God, through God, and for God' (1 Corinthians 8:6). Up until that point, everything we own is about 'me' and 'mine.' God's Word clearly teaches us that we are not the owners of our wealth. God is. Neither are we who produce the wealth, but God who gives us life and strength, wisdom, and knowledge to gain our wealth (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). If God is the owner, then, what are we? We are His stewards/managers of His wealth that is entrusted in our hands.

Accountability

Since we are God's stewards, God the Owner is most interested in the ways we manage His wealth. E.g. Let's say, you have some investment portfolios. To manage your wealth, you hire a financial adviser. As the owner of the portfolios, you would be most interested in knowing how your money is managed. Naturally, you will hold the financial adviser accountable. If the advisor is doing a great job, of course, you will be pleased and keep her. If not, you would fire her. In the same way, God the owner holds us His manager accountable with what we have done (or have not done) with His wealth. If He sees us squander His possessions '**for ourselves,**' He declares us '*unfit*' (v. 1). On the other hand, when we do a great job by sharing His wealth with others, God will be pleased and reward us accordingly.

The question is: Are you blessed by God in wealth? If so, praise God for that. And please remember this: His blessings are never meant to be just for you alone. God blesses you so that you may share the blessings with others. E.g. Jesus says, "Do **not** store up **for yourselves** treasures on earth,..."(Matthew 6:19). This past week, during my sermon preparation, the phrase "not for yourselves" became alive and stood out to my attention.

The treasures on earth are never meant to be stored up ‘for ourselves alone’ but ‘for others.’ Share your material blessings with the needy. That’s God’s will and His plan for you.

When we share our blessings with the needy, God not only *remembers* what we have done but also *repays* us. E.g. 1. *Almsgiving*—gifts to the poor (Acts 10:4). Cornelius the Roman centurion, the devout believer in God, helped the Jewish folks in town with his wealth. He also prayed to God continually (Acts 10:2). His prayers and *almsgiving* were remembered by God. E.g. 2. *If you help the poor, you are lending to the LORD—and he will repay you!* (Proverbs 19:17 (NLT)). When you help the needy, God says to you, “I owe you money” and He repays you.

Share the Blessings with Others

Some folks never discover such spiritual truths as ‘*we are the stewards of God’s wealth, not the owners’ and ‘our blessings are to be shared, not to be monopolized.’* E.g. The story of a king, somewhere in the Middle East, in the medieval time. During his reign, this king hoarded up in a tower all the treasures in his kingdom, precious stones and jewels, for himself. He was filthy rich alright, but he never used his treasures for his people. One day, his kingdom was invaded by a neighbor kingdom. Looking at the tower filled with treasures to the brim, the conquering king scolded the greedy king saying, “You fool! What have you done with all the wealth you have? Nothing! You thought you were going to live forever? See if you do.” Then, he locked him up in the same tower with no food, no water, and the foolish king starved to death. Treasures to be shared, not to be hoarded for self.

Now, some of us may find today’s story rather disturbing, for Jesus seems to compliment the manager’s dishonest act. However, the truth is not that He endorses such shrewd and dishonest accounting practice. Rather, He commends the “*crook’s cool thinking (Danker)*”—that is, the wisdom and the quick act of doing *something good (v. 8) in behalf of the debtors* with his master’s possessions (v. 1).

The punchline of today’s story: Turn your money into “heavenly capital” (Jerome). Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves. Share the blessings with the needy, then they will welcome you to eternal dwellings (v. 9). Your *almsgiving* definitely counts in your eternal life. This leads us to the next point.

Eternal Benefits

The way we handle the material wealth on earth has an impact on our future in Heaven--our eternal life. Few of us think that way, though.

Just remember this: sharing wealth in this life with the needy moves us close to God's heart who will, in turn, reward us with eternal dwellings in His presence (v. 9). Therefore, folks, be wise and prepare for your future in Heaven.

Conclusion

As your pastor, I urge you this morning to reflect on the way you share your wealth with others, particularly, with the less fortunate folks. How much do you share with the needy? Here's something to ponder. E.g. In 2019, Americans gave \$ 450 billion to charities. The lion's share, 29%, was given to 'religion' (about \$131 billion). Divided by 230 million Christians yields \$570 of giving per believer. Can we do better? Absolutely.

I read another article on poverty in America this week: in 2019, 37 million people in America lived below poverty line (the threshold is \$26,172 for a family of 4) (www.census.gov/library). That means, 37 million /330 million people = 11% (1 in 10 people living in poverty). What are we going to do about it? We can do better.

Were Jesus with us physically this morning, He would give us the same message: the shrewd manager. Use your material goods on behalf of others and I will welcome you into eternal home in My presence.

Ask yourself this week: is my understanding on treasures in sync with Jesus' teaching? Do I agree and accept that God is the owner, not I, and I am the steward? How's my management of God's wealth with the needy? How can I do it better and more?

Let us pray.