

Scripture Reading:

Luke 16: "1 [Jesus] also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. 2 So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' 3 Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' 5 So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So 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?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' 8 So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. 9 And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. 10 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. 11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? 13 No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.'"

"Who is Your Master?"

Our sermon title asks a simple question: Who is your master?

- **A question we must answer because Jesus says we cannot serve God and money! As we consider this critical question we will also learn the importance of being faithful in little things!**

This morning we obeyed the King's summons to come and worship

We have confessed our sins and accepted His pardon, turning to His Word for instruction and will shortly bring our gifts & prayers before Him

We will confess the Apostle's Creed together and feast at a Table instituted for us by the Lord in His presence and then we will be commissioned to serve him this week.

If the rest of your week matches up with what we are doing today, it should not be difficult to answer the question of Who is Your Master!

So if with these disciples we are prepared to say that Jesus is our master, then we should be prepared for the check-up or judgment that Jesus wants to make!

- **I want to begin this morning by considering how I might have written the Bible!**

Now that should sound shocking, but we must remember that for the past four hundred years or so, many have acted intentionally or unintentionally like that is what they were doing.

Someone is certainly acting as if they could do a better job when they say something in the Bible is not true! Someone is certainly acting as if they could do a better job when they say they know more about who wrote what books of the Bible than the Bible does! When we come to someone like Thomas Jefferson he actually DID rewrite the Bible leaving out all the miracles in the Gospels so the “message” of Jesus would come through more clearly!

So I want to ponder how I might have handled these parables, not to join with such folks but to illustrate why we MUST allow the Bible to determine what the Bible is saying AND what is important!

This is the third week where messages have been given to specific groups: First a message for the crowds, then one for the religious leaders and now one for the disciples. This morning we read about a very dishonest steward... That should be aimed at the Scribes and Pharisees, right? They have squandered the riches and blessings God, the master, has given them and it is time for them to be fired! A perfect fit.

Last week we had the Prodigal Son which was the perfect story for the crowds to show these publicans and sinners that there is a way home! And the week before that we had the tough challenge from Jesus to count the cost of discipleship... What better message for the disciples! So if I were Luke, I would have cleaned these up a bit, left out some of the confusing parts and delivered three clear messages for each of these groups!

Even Luke may have been tempted along such lines, but it is here where we remember Dr. Luke is NOT the author of these books... That would be the Holy Spirit and HE is giving us what He thinks is important!

- **So, yes as Jesus calls the masses to repentance in the way he did it teaches us some important things about evangelism**
- **When Jesus forces the religious leaders to confront their hard hearts it causes us to take a long look at how we respond to repentant sinners as well.**
- **And this morning, Lord willing, we will see a message aimed right at us as followers of Christ.**

So lets quickly review what we have in the parable before us:

We have a master who finds out that his steward has wasted his goods -no indication that anything illegal has been done... he does not take him to the magistrate nor is he in any hurry to move him out – The man was just not doing a good job!

We have a steward who is not very competent, not willing to work or beg, BUT he certainly knows how to look out for number ONE! *[explain how he provides for his future]*

There are a couple of places in this morning's text which tend confound many and verse 8 is the first: "So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly!" I am going to go out on a limb and posit that Hollywood has made it a little easier for our age to understand what the master was saying...

Does not Hollywood make a habit out of praising bad guys? When common thieves pull off a major caper, not only do we often catch ourselves cheering them on, but even the one who is robbed will often shake his head in amazement pondering how they pulled it off. I believe that such is the case here: The master obviously is not pleased to have lost more of his goods, but he is amazed at how shrewd this steward has been

Providing for his future at the master's expense, and not breaking any laws because again he is not hauled before the magistrate! So please remember two things here:

- **The steward is a very bad guy and he is not teaching us any good lessons!**
- **It is difficult to see the master as God as many are want to do when he is presented as a pretty incompetent fellow and praises immoral actions on the part of his steward.**

So with verse nine we see Jesus begin to teach the real lessons from this parable for His disciples: They all revolve around money with the conclusion from Jesus being:

"You cannot serve God and mammon!"

Jesus seems to use unrighteous mammon and mammon as interchangeable terms for the riches of this world, material things and they are contrasted with true riches which are eternal. I cannot fully explain how or why Jesus does this BUT we must guard against a couple of things that Jesus is clearly NOT teaching...

Jesus is NOT telling us to use the worldly ways with money to advance the Kingdom... No fancy Hollywood heists to increase the building fund! AND we must remember that we cannot even use the ill-gotten gain we may have accumulated as pagans, since it has to be returned as we learn with Zacchaeus in a few weeks!

I believe that the Apostle Paul summarized what Jesus is teaching here in the first Epistle to Timothy where we read in 6:17-19:

"Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let

them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

The Bible has MUCH to say about riches and how we handle them...

➤ **We live in an age where these teachings are MORE important than ever!**

First we see riches in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation:

Genesis 2, before the fall of man tells of the land of Havilah, where there is gold... Gold that is good! It also mentions bdellium and onyx stone, reminding us that God had built right into His creation all the riches that man would enjoy or abuse down through the ages!

Riches are associated with blessings throughout the Bible with the examples of Solomon and Job being the most familiar

And finally we see it in the New Creation where I would not begin to have the time to even mention all the wealth and riches described in Revelation chapters 21 & 22...

You can grab the Rich Lusk lectures from last year’s family camp for those details!

However, we also know that the Scriptures are full of warnings about riches, like our passage this morning. In the parable of the sower, we see riches as the thorns that grow and choke off the Gospel in the lives of those who have them.

In fact Jesus here makes it clear that we cannot have two masters: We must choose whether to serve Jesus on money! Just as He explained to the crowds that they must hate mother and father, wife or husband... Precious family members... to be His disciple

➤ **Jesus now tells the disciples that they must hate money!**

So if you begin to see that the same principle applies here, then we come to an important point to ponder based on who Jesus is addressing:

Which is easier to “hate” in the proper Biblical way... Family or Money?

Do you think Jesus thought those multitudes were ready for “meat” rather than “milk” so He started them off with the tough part? Jesus is now addressing the Disciples and I think He wants them to consider how much tougher it is to avoid having money be your master

Again His conclusion could not be stronger: “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon!”

So we are back to that critical question: Who is your master?

If we want the answer to be Jesus, then how do we know that we are not trying to serve two masters?

Many have used these verses to argue for vows of poverty saying that Christians should reject having any material possessions.

- **This is not what Jesus taught: His desire is, as it has always been, is to bless His people with riches**

AND Jesus gives us in this passage the basic principle that we need to learn how to handle wealth, and to gain even more, both here and in eternity.

- **Jesus says we must be faithful in little things:**

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much!”

We begin by doing little things right and then we will learn to be faithful in greater things.

Jesus brings a warning as well, “If you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon [the least], who will commit to your trust the true riches?”

So this is our simple lesson for today:

- **It is NOT how much money we have that determines whether we are serving Jesus rather than the money**
- **It is whether we have been faithful in how we have handled what money we have**

This is what Jesus judges

This is what determines whether we will be trusted with more!

Let me share a simple example for the children... and all of us!

-- You own a small restaurant and hire a new young man to wash dishes

Soon after you are looking out of your office into the dining areas and you see a family getting up to leave. The wife drops a dollar out of her purse onto the floor as they leave and go out into the parking lot. The young man comes over to clean up the dishes on the table and sees the dollar on the floor...

- **How might this man react?**

Let’s say the young man glances out in the parking lot to be sure the family is getting into their car and then quickly scoops up the dollar and puts it into his pocket, perhaps thinking to himself, finders keepers!

OR let’s say the young man glances out into the parking lot, sees they have not yet driven off and quickly grabs the dollar and chases after the family to return it.

- **Which reaction do you think would make a good impression on you as the owner?**

You are not going to fire the first young man, though you might encourage him to try and return the money if it happens again. You are not going to promote the new kid because of this one act, but it would be remembered.

Let's say in a few months you had a new opening that paid a lot more money that required running a cash register. Which of these two young men would you want to put in that position?

- **The one that was faithful in the little thing!**
- **How we handle the little things reveals our TRUE character!**

This is an important truth that applies to ALL of life and not just financial matters

We show that Jesus is our master rather than money by being faithful in the little things. We show that we are maturing in the faith when we are faithful in ALL areas of life. We cannot be sitting around waiting for God or someone else to trust us with the BIG things – We must first prove ourselves in the little things.

Going back to my restaurant owner, does it make a difference how one dresses for a job interview there?

- **It could be the first step in a ladder of a successful career, as it was in my life**

The kid who shows up looking very poorly may not get that job even though in his mind he has already picked out the suit and tie he will wear when he gets the interview for that BIG job... He failed to be faithful in the little things.

Another example that comes to mind is the recent strike at UC Davis medical center. I do not know whether they had a legitimate grievance, but they did NOT send the right signal to garner public support: Poorly dressed, loud music, party atmosphere did them no good.

We are quick to denounce school teachers for dressing inappropriately in the classroom, but are we setting a good example in our homes?

Do we pay attention to the “little things” about appearance around the house? Now you may think I am stepping on toes here, but the Lord taught me some tough lessons on this in the very week I was preparing the message: In one case, I unexpectedly hosted the Dennas and another friend in my home one morning this week, looking like I had just fallen out of bed. It was wrong and shameful and it will be a reminder that I have to be more faithful in the little things even at my age!

Now this is not intended to be legalistic or to imply that you can never relax around the house, anymore than Jesus is teaching that we should have no money!

Linda and I in our forties & fifties have grown to love sweats and we certainly enjoy relaxing around the house... BUT we need to be careful

Linda has always stressed to the young ladies the importance of properly receiving your husband home at night... Again little things to be faithful with

Those same few minutes you would certainly take to make sure you look good enough to go to lunch with some friends will send all the right signals to your husband that he still has that special place in your heart...

Even if HE does not acknowledge it very often,

WHICH men, is one of those little areas that you can be faithful in!

Young parents often think they will discipline on the big issues when they come up, overlooking the little ways that their child disobeys them:

- **This does not work!**
- **Teaches the wrong lessons!**

And just a quick word for our young men and boys as we talk about being faithful in little things : I will just remind you that I always tell a Godly young woman who is looking for a Godly husband that after determining He is a Christian, first and foremost she should watch how he treats his mother!

- **How better for her to see if he is being faithful in the little things!**

Have I wondered too far afield from a parable that discusses money? I think not...

The central lesson Jesus is teaching is the importance of being faithful in little things so we can be trusted with greater things –

- **His Kingdom which is going to include vast wealth!**

Money will bring great temptations and cause major problems – usually at the heart of marriage problems. We handle those temptation and solve those problems IF we have the strength and wisdom learned by being faithful in little things!

Remember the example of the young boy in your restaurant... The one who made a right choice had the better character which had been developed through years of training He had learned to be faithful in little things regarding money, not by dealing with money all the time, but from his experience in other areas!

Today's lesson is NOT focused solely on money, but ALL of life: As we read in Paul letter to young Timothy:

“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”