

Luke 16:1-13

Somewhere along the line you've probably **heard** the **complaint**, "All the church ever talks about is **money**." Perhaps you've even made that complaint **yourself**. It's a very common **misconception** which is held by many of the **critics** of organized religion. Sadly, it can even become an **excuse** which some people use to **stay away** from church altogether. Why is **money** such a touchy subject? Why don't people want to hear about money at **church**? After all, it was a topic that Jesus Himself talked about on **many** different occasions.

I think one of the problems that people have with the topic of **money** is that they focus their attention on the **wrong question**. We ask ourselves, "How much money do I **give** to church, or how much more **could I**, or **should I** be giving?" But what we really **need** to do is focus on the more **important question**, "How am I using **all** of the resources which God has **given** to me?" That's what Jesus asks in our text this morning, He puts the whole topic of money and possessions into the **proper perspective**. So, let's take a look at Jesus' words today, and see just how it is that we can **Use Earthly Wealth For A Heavenly Purpose**.

As has been the case for quite a number of weeks now, our text today again begins with one of Jesus' **parables**. But this **particular** parable has been **misunderstood** more often than many others, because **in** it, Jesus seems to **commend** a **dishonest** manager. Let's take a look at **why** He did that. Whenever we study a parable, it's important to look for the **one main point** which that parable is teaching, and not to go **beyond** that point by trying to explain every little **detail** in the parable. So let's look at the **facts** of this parable, and see if we can uncover the **main point**. Jesus spoke about a **manager** who got in trouble with his **employer** because he hadn't been doing a very good job of managing. The manager knew that he was going to be **fired**. All that was left for him to **do** was to hand over the **accounting** books, which would **confirm** his mismanagement. But before he **did** that, he took some quick **action**. He knew that life was not going to be **easy** for him after he lost his job. So while he was still the **manager** of his **master's** resources, he made some **friends** who might be able to help him out during those difficult times in the future. He **made** these friends by reducing the **debt** they owed to his **employer** - cutting one person's debt by **20%**, and another one by **50%**. His actions could be described in a **number** of different ways. We might call his actions **sneaky**, or **conniving**, or **under-handed**, or even **dishonest**. But, in the **end**, his actions were very **smart**. The manager used the resources he had at his disposal to serve a **single purpose** - and his employer actually **commended** him for those actions.

That's the **main point** of this parable. God wants us to be **wise** in the way we manage our **resources**, so that those resources serve a **single purpose**. And that's actually where **unbelievers** have a leg up on us **believers**. If we take a look at the **unbelieving** world around us, it **carries out** this point over and over again. Just as Jesus said in His parable, the people of our **world** are very good at being **shrewd** and achieving their **goals**, by **single-mindedly** doing whatever they **need** to do to make them happen. They don't worry about what **others** may think, or even about what **God** may think of their actions. They simply need to accomplish their **goal** - **whatever** that goal may be.

The **business** world is very good at looking at the **bottom line**, and evaluating all their actions in **light** of that bottom line. More often than not, the bottom line is making **money**. So everything in business boils down to a **cost vs. benefit** analysis. As an **example** of that, some of you might be familiar with a car that was made back in the 1970's - the Ford **Pinto**. The Ford Corporation knew that because of the location of the **gas tank**, Pintos were routinely catching on **fire** in crash tests. It was projected that fixing the problem would **annually** result in 180 fewer **deaths**, and 180 fewer **other** serious injuries. So they did an **analysis** to find out what it would **cost** in order to **fix** the problem. In the end, it was determined that the deaths and injuries would cost society about **\$49.5 million** a year, while the cost of moving the gas tank to a safer location would cost Ford **\$137 million**. As a result of the study, they left the gas tanks right where they were.

You and I would **never** act like that, right? We recognize the **real value** of those human **lives**, and how **foolish** it is to devote all of our energy and resources toward a completely **earthly** purpose - whether that purpose is making **money**, or having **fun**, or seeing as much of the **world** as we possibly can, or **whatever**. We know that **God** has given us a **higher** purpose for our lives - the purpose of serving **Him**. But sadly, instead of **devoting** ourselves to that purpose with the same kind of **single-mindedness** that the people of this **world** have for **earthly** purposes, we often **split** our focus, and try to do **multiple things** at the same time. The new man in us **wants** to serve **God** and make that a **priority**, but at the same time, the **old** man in us **doesn't** want to completely give up on serving our own **selfish** purposes. Jesus tells us today that that we can't have it **both** ways. He said, "*No servant can serve two masters,*" - much less **three**, or **four**, or **five**. Yet, how often, don't we find ourselves **trying** to do just that? In reality, we might be able to **fool** ourselves into thinking that we can **balance** service to **God** with service to **ourselves** and the **world**, but it won't take very long before **one** of those two masters will **lose out**.

So which master are **we** going to serve? Before we **decide**, we should really make sure we **understand** the choices that are before us. On the **one** hand, we have our own **selfish** desires. What do **they** have to **offer** us? - perhaps some **pleasure**, or **fun**, maybe some **short-term** gains - but they can also bring a lot of **heartache**, **regret**, **guilt**, and **pain**. And if serving a **worldly** master leads us to lose Jesus as our **heavenly** Master, then there are also the **eternal** consequences of condemnation in **hell**, and separation from **God** forever. So, serving **ourselves** doesn't seem to be a very wise option.

But in reality we don't even **have** to choose, because the **choice** has already been made **for us**. **God chose us** from all eternity to be His very own. **God sent** His one and only Son to live a perfect life, and to die on the cross for **your** sins and for **mine**. In Holy Baptism, **God planted faith** in our hearts, and **made** us His own dear **children**. As a result, the blessings which we receive from our **God** include **forgiveness**, **hope**, **joy**, and **peace**; along with the **eternal** blessing of a perfect home in **heaven**, where we will be **free** from all **sorrow**, **pain**, and **tears**. When we received that gift of **faith** from our God, we **also** received a **purpose** for our lives. That **purpose** is simply to **serve our God** - to give **thanks** to Him for **everything** He has done for us, and to make known to the world the **Good News** that eternal peace is only available through **Jesus**.

That **Gospel truth** is the key to unlocking the **meaning** of the parable that we have before us today. Jesus **isn't** commending the dishonest manager for being **dishonest**. He's commending him for being **shrewd** - for using the resources which were available to him for a **single purpose**. God wants us to devote **our** lives and resources to a **single purpose** - hanging on to **Jesus** - who has earned eternal salvation for **us** and for **everyone else**. All of the other things in this world - our **money** and **possessions**, our **time** and **energy**, our personal **relationships** - these all need to **line up** with that single purpose. It doesn't mean we have to **despise** those things, but rather, we need to see them as just one small **part** of a much **larger picture** - a picture that gives **glory** to **God**. That's what Jesus meant He said, "*Use **worldly** wealth to gain **friends** for yourselves, so that when it is **gone**, you will be welcomed into **eternal** dwellings.*" We can take **worldly wealth** - something that has led so many people into **sin** and **grief** - and we can put it to work for a **heavenly** purpose - leading people to **Jesus**. Think about how **wonderful** it will be to arrive in heaven, and to be greeted by men, women, and children who are there, because we put our resources to work for **God's** purpose of **saving souls** for all eternity. That will be our **reward** for **Using Earthly Wealth For A Heavenly Purpose**.

Money and possessions are just a **small part** of it. God has also given us something much more **valuable** than those things. As Jesus said, “*Whoever can be trusted with very **little** can also be trusted with **much**.*” The very **little** that we have been trusted with is our **money** and **possessions**. The **much** that God has trusted us with is **God’s Word** - the message of **salvation**, by God’s **grace**, through **faith** in Jesus. That’s our **true** wealth, and we have the opportunity to put that Gospel message to **work**, by sharing our **Savior** with others, so we can gain friends for all **eternity**.

Remember the shrewd manager in Jesus’ parable. He did **whatever** he had to in order to accomplish his **earthly** goal. May we follow the **LORD** with that same kind of **single-minded** devotion, and be willing to do **whatever** it takes to accomplish our **heavenly** purpose - to serve our **God**, and to share His **love** - using **all** of our gifts and resources to work for the glory of **God’s** name, and for the good of **His** kingdom. Amen.