

17th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 16:1 - 13 (NIV)

¹Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ²So 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— ⁴I 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?' ⁸"'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. "He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' ⁹"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. ¹⁰I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. ¹¹"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. ¹²So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹³And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? ¹⁴"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."

Theme: Making the Shrewd Investment.

Today's text is something that we can understand well. A man loses his job and wonders how he will make ends meet. A lot of people have gone through that. He is looking for the best investment for his future. How many of us aren't looking for some investment that will pay off?

The master in our text commends the dishonest manager, but he doesn't commend him for his dishonesty. He commends him for his shrewdness. Jesus says that the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than the people of light. They make investments to make their lives on this earth secure, while we Christians have opportunity to make the shrewdest investment of all, but we often act foolishly. In these verses Jesus encourages us to use the worldly gifts that He has given to us shrewdly.

I. God has blessed us with much unrighteous wealth.

In verse 9 Jesus says to make friends with our "unrighteous wealth." The older translations translate "unrighteous wealth" literally from the Greek as "unrighteous mammon." The same word is used in verse 13 where Jesus says that you can't serve both God and money. Mammon is one of those Hebrew words that have come down to us untranslated. Some other such words are: Hallelujah (praise the Lord), Amen (truly) or the Greek Kyrie eleison (Lord have mercy). The word mammon means, to have what goes beyond what we need. A good translation is wealth or luxury. Our wealth is also called "unrighteous" because it is often used in evil ways and gives us many temptations.¹

Most of us have a lot of "unrighteous mammon." Think of all the things you have, which you don't really need. Many of us have HD tv's ipods, cell phones, more clothes than we can count, and cars. We have so much to eat, that most of us could stand to lose a few pounds. Some of us have money in the bank and other investments. Compared to most people in the world, we really do have a lot of unrighteous mammon.

¹Luther's Sermons, vol. IV, pp. 292-293.

II. The manager in Jesus' parable was very shrewd with his unrighteous mammon.

Somehow he had been causing his boss to lose money, so his boss called him to give him notice that he would be fired. That caused the man to wonder what he would do. He was losing a good job. He wasn't strong enough to dig, and he was too proud to beg. He thought about his situation and then the light came on. He came up with an idea that would make friends, so that when he lost his job, they would be happy to welcome them. In the little time he had left, he called in all his master's debtors, and drastically lowered their accounts. He fixed things so that those people would feel indebted and grateful to him. When the master heard of it, despite of what else he said, he commended the man on his shrewdness.

Jesus also commends the man on his shrewdness. He says, *"The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the children of the light."* That man knew what kind of investments to make, even with someone else's money, to make his life secure. Jesus doesn't commend what he did, but that what he did, he did shrewdly and well. While the people of this world are so shrewd at planning their short futures here, we Christians are often lazy and careless in dealing with God's things and the eternal. Often we are not as shrewd. We often don't put as much effort into our faith as the people of this world put into their dealings. Jesus also wants us to be wise and shrewd when it comes to our faith and using the gifts that He has given us.

III. How can we as Christians invest shrewdly?

Trust in God and His goodness to us. In vs. 13 Jesus says, *"No servant can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and mammon."* He's asking us an important and a difficult question. Which do you serve and trust in, God or your wealth? Are you looking for God to provide you with what you need in this life, or is your trust in your check book? As the numbers in our bank accounts grow, the temptation also grows to trust in our wealth. Sometimes we might forget God, or even feel that we don't need Him. Because of that, it's often a blessing in disguise when we fall on hard or uncertain times. Then our thoughts often go heavenward, and we realize that every thing we have is a gift from God. We might even get to the point that we begin to trust in and serve our wealth so much, that we completely forget our spiritual needs. It's easy to get so caught up in our money and possessions that we forget our greatest need of all, the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, and our eternal salvation. No, we can't serve both. Either we trust in God's goodness to us both in things spiritual and earthly, or else we trust in our check book. It has to be one or the other. The biggest problem with earthly mammon is that when we die, it all goes to someone else. Generally, they either waste it or they fight over it. When our sins trouble us, when we find ourselves in any need, and when we die and find ourselves before God's judgement throne, the only riches that count are being rich toward God through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ. The greatest riches are those which Christ won for us through His innocent suffering and death on the cross.

Use the "unrighteous mammon" God gives to us to win friends. In vs. 9 Jesus says, *"I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal dwellings."* Jesus isn't telling us to try to buy our way into heaven. We are saved by God's grace, His "undeserved love" alone. But He tells us to use what wealth He has given us to help those who are in need. The friends Jesus is talking about are the poor, the needy, and those who need to hear the Gospel. The shrewdest investment we can make is to share what God has given us with those who are in need. Such generosity won't be forgotten by our Lord or by those whom we have helped, eternally. In a sermon on this text Martin Luther says that those whom we helped will be witnesses of our faith in Christ. Jesus Himself will say to His followers at the judgement, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did it to me. We won't be saved because of our generosity, but God's grace moves us to love each other as Christ has loved us."

Sometimes God places someone in our lives, who need our help. Many times we can look back at our lives and remember people who have helped us. We are thankful to both God and them for that help. Other times the people whom we help live very far away. Our gifts to organizations like LCMS

World Relief help people very far away, whom we don't know at all. We also give our gifts for the spread of the Gospel. Your gifts to this congregation help to support our various ministries here, missions in S. Africa, the Dominican Republic, our Lutheran High School, seminaries, and the various missions of the month. Soon we will begin collecting again for our Christian Concern Fund, which aids people in our congregation in need. As we look for ways to share the gifts that God has given to us with those in need and to spread the Gospel, Jesus says that we will be making eternal friends. The impact of our gifts for the good of other people will last for eternity. We help those who are in need in Jesus' name, and we support missions. When the fruit of those gifts is that someone comes to faith or is strengthened in their faith, we have used our "unrighteous mammon" in a blessed way.

When we are faithful with small things, God will also give us heavenly treasures. In Vs. 10 Jesus says, *"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."* What Jesus is saying is that when we prove ourselves faithful with the "Unrighteous mammon" He has blessed us with on this earth, then He will also bless us with Heavenly treasures. So the shrewdest investments we can make with God's gifts to us is to use them to God's glory. When we are faithful with the worldly wealth He has given us, then He will also entrust us with heavenly riches that will last forever.

We can be thankful that God has blessed us with so much "unrighteous mammon. See that worldly wealth as gifts that God entrusts to us to use to His glory and help those who are in need.

May God help us to always trust alone in Him for our salvation and all our earthly needs, and may He help us to use what He has blessed us with to be a blessing to others, that will help them rejoice in His goodness too.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
September 19, 2010***