

Sermon: Luke 16:1-13 - How could Jesus commend a dishonest manager? Pentecost 18, October 13, 2019

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Have you ever had that moment, whether it was at work, or maybe at school, when someone was commended when you *knew* that they totally didn't deserve it? Maybe someone at work got a lot of love from the boss despite being one of the lazier people at work. Maybe at school when you were a part of that group project, and it really was a "you" project, your partner got that nice 'A' when he didn't do any of the work! It's that feeling of "really? them?" That might seem kind of familiar when we look at our text today. Jesus tells us a parable about a dishonest manager. And when he gets to the end he commends him? Really, him? Something just doesn't seem right. Several times Jesus tells us that this man was dishonest. Not only that; he was *wicked*. But even so, the master was impressed with the way that this manager managed. So naturally that leads many of us to think,

"How could Jesus commend a dishonest manager?"

"There was a rich man who had a manager who was accused of wasting his possessions." Jesus starts this parable with the big problem right away. A manager was wasting his master's possessions! He was being way too loose with his master's money. Maybe he was deceitfully using it for himself, maybe he was just not being responsible with the money and wasting it on frivolities. Either way, the manager's behavior must have gone unnoticed by his master, because someone else had to tell him about it!

The accuser was probably a hired hand in the household, maybe even a slave! Either way, this unnamed person noticed how loose and free the manager was with his master's money and the rest of his property and like the good and concerned employee he was, he told his boss about it! I imagine that he was a good worker, that he cared about his master's estate, and that he must've been very happy when he heard his master's response to the manager's crime, **"You can no longer be manager."**

Imagine the horror of this unnamed worker when he sees what happens next! This scumbag of a manager is handing out favors on his master's behalf without his knowledge! He saw it all transpire, someone who owed his master 600 gallons of olive oil suddenly only owed him 300 gallons. Someone who owed his master 600 bushels of wheat suddenly only owed him 480 bushels! This evil manager was stealing from his master with the final couple of hours that he had in his position. Oh, if this manager was only getting fired before, he could only imagine what would happen to this dishonest manager now.

The master returned and here stood the worker waiting to see what judgment he would pass down on this wicked manager. He saw his master begin to open his mouth. And when he heard his master's words he couldn't help let his mouth hang open in disbelief. His master commended this behavior? The master was impressed with his shrewdness? Did his master actually praise him for his actions? How could his master commend this dishonest manager? That's a question that we ask right along with him, because Jesus says that the master had a point!

Now keep in mind, that this manager was not a good guy. Our reading calls him dishonest, which is true. The Greek literally calls him an *unrighteous* manager. He was wicked! And yet here is Jesus saying, "do you see the shrewd way that this wicked manager acted? It's a shame that my followers don't act that way." What are we supposed to make of this?

This manager was a wicked man. He had wasted his master's possessions. After he was caught, he ended up down-right stealing from his master by reducing people's debts. Surely Jesus isn't telling us to go and do likewise. He doesn't want us to waste our resources or steal from others, right? This is called the parable of the *dishonest* manager. Surely Jesus isn't telling us to be dishonest with what we have to get ahead. He isn't telling us to fudge on our taxes or to lie on our financial aid applications so that we can have more comfortable lives. So what is it about this manager that Jesus tells his followers to emulate?

It is his shrewdness. To be shrewd means to show sharp powers of judgment. And this manager showed exceedingly sharp powers of judgment when he realized that his time was up. He figured out exactly what he needed to do to ensure himself a comfortable future after he lost his job. The fact that he was shrewd and *wicked*, doesn't mean that it is a bad thing to be shrewd in the first place!

Jesus laments that the **“the children of this world (unbelievers) are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the children of the light are. I tell you, make friends for yourselves with unrighteous mammon, so that when it runs out, they will welcome you into eternal dwellings.”** So instead of bringing the hammer down on this dishonest manager he brings it down on us! The shrewdness of the manager is the example!

This manager made excellent use of resources that were not his. When he got his termination notice he thought to himself, I can't dig, I won't beg, I've got to do something to make sure that my future will be a good one! He thought, what can I do with my master's resources to make a better future for myself? If I make friends now, they will treat me well when I need it. He goes on to rob his master to make friends for himself, friends who would welcome him into their homes in the future. Jesus should be condemning this manager! Instead he commends the manager and condemns you and me! Jesus says that the children of the light aren't shrewd when they use what God has trusted to them to manage.

We aren't shrewd when we use God's gifts; we don't make the most of the possessions that are on loan to use from our master in heaven. Everything we have is not our own. Everything we have belongs to another, to God. We should use those resources to make friends on earth so that they will greet us with open arms in heaven. Instead of making friends with our resources, we direct far too much of our master's possessions to our own lives. Money has this way of deceiving us. When we use money to serve only ourselves, we are being tricked. For we are not serving ourselves, but our money. Money always tempts us to use it for ourselves. When we give in, we make money our master. When we give in, we are serving that very gift which God has given us to make friends and serve him. Jesus said, **“No servant can serve two masters. Indeed, 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 *mammon*.”** When you aren't shrewd with your money, when you waste it on yourselves and don't use it to make friends, you are not serving your God. You are serving money.

Because you have failed to serve God with the possessions that he has given you on loan; he offered another gift to this world on loan. His gift was on loan for 33 years. That gift was Jesus. The very one who tells us this parable was the shrewdest manager of them all. He used his entire life to make eternal friends as he preached the gospel. He used his life to perfectly obey God's demands of the law in your place. He was the perfect manager of the perfect life and he has passed that perfect life on to you. And now wearing the white robe of Jesus' righteousness, your eternal future is assured.

Christ made the most of his time and his possessions as he lived and walked among us. He did all he could with what he had to bring the good news of the gospel to many people. He made the most of his time as he experienced every excruciating second of torment and suffering on Good Friday. When Jesus hung on the cross he was offered vinegar mixed with gall to drink. The gall was intended to dull his senses so that he could more easily endure that cross. Jesus refused. Jesus intended to suffer every second of God's wrath to the fullest, so that the punishment you deserved for serving your money instead of God would be poured out on him. Punishment no longer awaits you. You are forgiven.

Why did Jesus commend a dishonest manager? Not because he was dishonest, for sure. But because he was shrewd. Jesus wants all his followers to be just as shrewd with their possessions. The manager was given as an example to learn from so that we might faithfully serve our Savior. Be shrewd with what you have, use it to serve the Lord, make friends for yourself in the name of Jesus. So that when the money is gone, they will welcome you into eternal dwellings. Dwellings prepared and given to you because of what Jesus, the shrewd manager of our salvation has done. Amen.