

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
October 21, 2012
“Christ’s Love, Our Calling” –
True Riches**

Luke 16:1-15

Week 1: Don’t Be Mastered!

- 1. Deciphering the parable**
- 2. Applying its truths**

**Hymns: 221 – 478 – Distribution: 487, 476 –
Closing: 473 (1,4)**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Luke 16:1-15 –Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So 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.’

“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—I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’ So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied. ‘The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.’

“Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. ‘He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

“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. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. 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. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?

“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.”

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”

One of the favorite Lutheran questions to ask is: “What does this mean?” Every year our students taking Catechism class ask this question many times in their memory work. In the Ten Commandments, they recite, “You shall not steal. What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not take our neighbor’s money or property, or get it by dishonest dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of income.”

“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. What does this mean?...”
“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. What does this mean?...”

When they learn the parts of the Lord’s Prayer, it’s the same:

- Our Father in heaven. What does this mean?
- Give us today our daily bread. What does this mean?

In the parable that is in front of us today from Luke 16, we are going to have to ask this question. And it will not be as easy a question to answer as with other parables of Jesus. The reason is that this parable has some puzzling details:

- A crooked manager has the spotlight in this story, and he is commended for what he does(?)
- One verse has Jesus saying, “Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone,

you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings"?)

What does this mean?! One pastor I read commented on this parable that he had never preached on this story of Christ in his ministry because he hadn't come to grips with what exactly Jesus meant!

It certainly is an interesting place to begin as we start a four-week sermon series today. Our Wisconsin Synod is in Year 3 of a program called "***Christ's Love, Our Calling.***" In this third year, they have provided us with services focused on the theme "*True Riches.*" This series will explore God's blessings of material possessions to us in this life, and our attitude and proper use of them. **As we enter this series in Week 1 today, Jesus' parable of the Dishonest Steward will explore the theme: "Don't Be Mastered!" In this first message we will:**

1. **Decipher the parable**
2. **Apply its truths**

1. Deciphering the parable

We read in Luke 16: "*Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So 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.'*"

"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—I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' "Eight hundred gallons of olive oil," he replied. "The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'" Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' "A thousand bushels of wheat," he replied. "He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'"

"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."

Let's review the details here:

- A master who is tremendously wealthy had a steward, or manager, who was in charge of his business.
- The steward had a charge brought against him that he has been wasting (literally, "scattering") his master's possessions. Due to the fact that the steward never tried to defend himself we assume that it was most likely true.
- The master called the manager in and told him to prepare his final report and hand in his files.
- Then we have the interesting soliloquy where the manager wondered what he will do after he is fired. He decided to make friends with the master's debtors for when he is fired. He called them in and with two of them, he reduced the amount that they owe his master. One owed the staggering amount of 800 gallons of olive oil; it was reduced half to 400 gallons. The second debtor had his debt reduced from 1000 bushels of wheat to 800. These amounts would be official, since he was still functioning in an official capacity for his master.
- Then the master commended(!) the dishonest manager for being so wise. What does this mean?

A few interpreters have tried to make the steward a noble character in this story. (It seems like a problem to have the model character be crooked, doesn't it?) Some have suggested that he was reducing the amounts of the exorbitant interest that the master was charging, thus doing right in his situation. Or some suggest that he was subtracting his high commission that he was supposed to get, so he was not playing fast and loose with his master's belongings. This makes for a more noble hero to emulate, doesn't it?

I don't think that either of those was the case, especially with Jesus' editorial comment, "*For the people of this world are*

more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.” He’s talking about worldly actions of worldly people! **This dishonest steward is not being commended for dishonesty, but for his shrewdness in using money and things to his advantage. He was being the master, the “user,” of money. He saw its true value when it was all coming to an end for him.**

His master, another “person of the world,” was certainly not happy that his fortune had been reduced, but he admired the clever plan that the steward had devised, much like people might marvel at the ingenious way a robber planned to rob a bank.

In a surprising transition to the lessons that he has to teach, Jesus said that there are lessons to learn for the “children of light” from the “children of the world.” What are these truths?

2. Applying its truths

Let’s break down the following verses that describe these teachings:

1. *“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”*

Here Jesus uses a play on words with the picture in the parable. The dishonest steward had “made friends” by using worldly wealth so he would be welcomed into people’s homes later on. Putting a spiritual look on this, Jesus instructs his disciples to use worldly wealth to “make friends,” or more clearly put, for use in God’s kingdom for God’s purposes. They should use their resources to work for the kingdom of God. They should bring the Word to others. They should not be mastered by worldly wealth, but use it! Use it directly to win others for Christ. Put it to use in God’s kingdom and also in God-pleasing ways that show your faith. One day those whom they have helped

with our gifts to do the Lord’s work will welcome them into “eternal tents” in eternal life!

An interesting point is that worldly wealth, although it has numerous traps and temptations, can be used for good. Don’t despise it! Use it for the kingdom because the end is coming. Don’t be mastered by it.

2. *“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. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?”*

Here is a serious principle that Jesus taught. A person who is a trustworthy manager with a little will be trustworthy with a lot. It is the nature of that manager. If a person cannot handle the “least” (worldly wealth), how can they be possessors of the “great” (spiritual treasures)? If money and worldly wealth has mastered you, how can you say you are a possessor of the kingdom of God?

This is an indicator of faith, a serious matter to consider. After all, worldly wealth is quite a trap for many. Martin Luther said once that the pocketbook is the last part of a person to be converted. Human nature doesn’t change much, it seems.

3. *“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.”* In NT times a servant or slave certainly did not have two masters. It was not possible!

To illustrate today, we might consider how passionate people get over the teams that they cheer for. Today the Seattle Seahawks play their

division rival, the San Francisco 49ers. If you are a passionate Seahawks' fan, you cannot be a 49ers fan. It is not possible! If you are a Green Bay Packers' fan, you cannot be a Chicago Bears' fan.

On a much more serious note, you cannot be a servant and lover of God and a servant and lover of Money. They do not mix. In fact, there are differing philosophies between them. Servants of God "scatter" their money and resources for his kingdom and generously to others. They are not worried about their daily bread. Servants of Money "gather" it obsessively.

The basic lesson in all of this is really pretty simple in the end: Don't be mastered!

Money and earthly possessions are certainly a necessary part of this life. But is it a means to an end, or is it the end? Is it a necessity to use along the way, or is it the goal? Especially with the end of the world and the end of our lives in sight, is it the means to use or is it the goal?

Don't be mastered!

We see the reaction of those who were not on Christ's side: *"The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, 'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.'"*

Literally, it says that they "turned their nose up" at what Jesus was saying, because this was not for them.

Therefore, it's good for us to ask some serious questions about this topic:

- Have you ever heard the phrase "They're all about money." That phrase is pretty descriptive! Does it describe you?
- Is money on your mind every day?
- When someone asks how you're doing, is the first thing you think of money? Does it come up often in your conversations with others?
- What is the role of work in your life?

- What are your goals in life? Are they driven by worldly wealth?
- Do you measure yourself and your success by "stuff" such as clothes, your home, your style of cell phone, or your car?
- **Are you mastered?**

When we see how worldly wealth has mastered us in the past, there is only one solution. We need to hear in 1 Peter 1, *"You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."* Your salvation was not bought with something as trivial as worldly wealth. Your forgiveness and place in heaven was purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, God's own Son, who came to serve as your Savior. You are forgiven of such sins, and you are also now free. You are free from its mastery. You don't need to be controlled by it. In fact, God has promised to give you what you need for life. **Your attitude about the great advantages of worldly wealth are under control, for the God of your salvation is your master!**

What does this mean? We have asked that question today as we've unraveled what many have found to be a perplexing parable of Jesus. In the end, it's quite simple. **Remember who your true Master is, and what the role of worldly wealthy in your life is.**

God bless us to that end. And God bless us in the weeks ahead as we look at other Scriptural thoughts on true riches! Amen.