

## Sermon The Unjust Steward Luke 16. 2022

The Parable of the Unjust Steward is considered Jesus' hardest parable to make sense of. The difficulty lies in the fact that a man defrauds his boss, and yet he appears to be praised by his boss and even held up by Jesus as an example for his disciples to follow

This parable has a familiar setting: Jesus is preaching with Tax collectors and sinners present to hear and criticize him. And after telling two relatively uncontroversial parables about the joy of lost things being found, he tells this third one about the Unjust Steward.

A rich man has a manager, and he gets a bad report about him fiddling the books. He calls him to account, and the manager knows the game is up. He's guilty and he knows it. But he's shrewd enough to figure a way out of his mess. He'll give his boss's creditors huge discounts to win their favor, defrauding his master, but creating good-will for himself. And the parable ends with this strange comment that the master praised the dishonest servant because he had acted shrewdly.

There is no getting away from it - the Unjust Steward, this manager, was not managing well, and was lining his own pockets.

So why would his master praise him? And why would Jesus use him as an example?

To make sense of this it helps to look at the whole gospel of Luke and how he shows Jesus uses his parables to teach moral truths, about how to live your life.

The moral point of this parable is what Jesus says at the end: you can't serve two masters.

This manager in the story had put his own needs above doing his job properly, causing his boss's business to falter. His interests were definitely clashing with his boss's.

While this story worked in the context of first century Palestine, doesn't this happen in today's world? Many people find themselves stretched and serving more than one master. All the balls can't be juggled properly. Career, family, hobbies, sports, even kids find themselves with impossible schedules to attend too many fixtures and events. We find ourselves spread too thin. What happens then is we choose between things. Choosing Sunday sports and trips to Home Depot, for

example, are choices many now make over going to church and observing a sabbath to honor God.

How does Jesus address this in the story? He speaks about being trustworthy in small things as well as big. In the story the manager lets the ball drop gets lax in his daily duties. So he gets demoted. And then what happens is, to redeem himself, he goes into crisis mode, and works out ways for the debtors to pay back part of what they owe the master.

When he realized his livelihood was in danger, he did the work he had let go so that he could be back in the master's good books.

The great 11<sup>th</sup> Century mystic and theologian, Hildegard of Bingen, who we commemorate this weekend, herself gave a moral resolution to this story. As the master praised the manager for buying off the debtors to redeem himself, so did Adam, after falling from grace in the Garden of Eden, achieve redemption with God by undertaking the good stewardship of all creatures of the earth.

There is redemption for the manager. He was given another chance to serve his master. He found his purpose, his ministry again. So the point is this can be made right, with the right commitment, and keeping sight of the greater vision.

That's how it is with us, just when we find ourselves trying to do too much at one time, being pulled in different directions. If we claim to be followers of Jesus' teaching, shouldn't we put our faith and trust in directions he is leading us, not fitting our worship and prayer lives something we fit in when we have time?

In the end it comes down to what you think is most important. As Jesus said;

“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other,...

In our world, power and money and the pursuit of them become the slave to many. And there are both honest and dishonest uses of money and power. So, when Jesus said *‘it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God’*.

He didn't say being wealthy precludes you from salvation. His point was, what matters is how wisely you use both. Don't store up more than you need, and use wisely what you have by sharing and enabling others.

Life is about the grace and forgiveness of God, given freely and unearned. And using our money and our time to support God's work, in building the Kingdom of God

*"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, Jesus doesn't want half-hearted discipleship; He wants total committed discipleship from His followers(Luke 16:13)*

And so he's challenging us:

Will you put in the effort to serve Jesus?

If so, what do you make your priorities?

Are your priorities in things that will fade away,

Or is your priority to build the Kingdom of God here on earth, and for eternity?

If we are followers of Jesus, we are called to be His servants. And lest we think in these times of declining church attendance and membership, what can we do significantly, as we are a small congregation, we need to remember that God can certainly use small congregations, when they are open to him with their time, talents and gifts. And that's for us to ponder, collaborate upon, and keep in near sight, when other calls upon our time and talents compete.

In this gospel message today, Jesus was echoing the words of the prophet Joshua stated many years earlier, with the same message, when he also urged his listeners "Choose you this day whom you will serve.....but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord".

AMEN