

Luke 16:1-13

Most people have role-models that they try to emulate—a world-class athlete, a famous musician, a successful businessman. As Christians we are encouraged to learn from faithful men and women such as St. Paul, Peter, John, and Mary, and imitate them. But in our text, Jesus tells about a dishonest manager and seems to suggest that we are to imitate him. It might make more sense to us had Jesus discussed this conniving, underhanded steward and then said, “This is how you are not to act.” But instead, the dishonest manager is the “hero” of the parable. He works himself out of an impossible situation; about to lose his job, a future with no hope—and he comes up with an idea, and when he puts it into practice his boss commends him for his ingenuity.

Now obviously Jesus doesn't want us to sneak around behind our employer's back; lie, cheat, and steal in order to pay off our bills. We don't set aside God's Commandments for the purpose of reaching our goals in life. But a point the parable makes is that we Christians can learn much from observing those of the world around us. What we learn from this man in Luke 16 is that he clearly understood the importance of planning for his future. He was about to lose his job because he had been wasting his master's possessions. To ensure that he would be taken care of when the money ran out, he reduced the debts of his master's debtors cutting one bill from 100 to 50, another from 100 to 80, and so on. When he would lose his job, therefore, he would have friends who would take care of him—friends that he made at his master's expense.

What's the point for us? We need to learn the importance of planning for our future and the futures of our loved ones. What is our future? It's Jesus Christ. Everything else that we have will one day be gone. Christ is our future because in Him we have an everlasting home; a glory that will not fade away. And Christ Jesus is here for you and me now in His Word, in His Sacred Meal, and in the washing of Holy Baptism. And so these things should be our greatest priority. Nothing should stand in the way of the hearing and reading of God's Word, and His Sacraments. There is nothing more important for you and your family than these holy things of Christ.

And so we have this to think about: How much time do you spend teaching your family the Christian Faith? Do you regularly worship together? Do you read God's Word together? Do you pray together? Or do we set a higher priority on television and computer screens, and recreational activities?

The man in the parable put the highest priority on securing his future, and yet we Christians seem to become distracted on a regular basis. If anyone has a reason to live for the future, it's us! And yet, compare your life to that of your non-Christian neighbor. Are your daily and weekly habits really any different from his? He doesn't read the Bible and study it...do you? He doesn't pray much...do you? He doesn't worry about missing church on Sundays...do you? He may even give more money to his favorite charity than you and I give to the Lord; and yet he does not know about God's love in Christ Jesus—that Christ died for him...and you do. You have a future in Christ...he doesn't. Your priorities, therefore, and your daily and weekly activities should be very different from his, because your life is all about Jesus Christ, and his isn't. And yet it may be quite difficult to see that we live any differently from him.

And so what does this make us? Well, according to God's condemning Law it makes us unfaithful stewards, dishonest managers just like the man in the parable. He wasted his master's possessions, and so do we. God's greatest gifts to us are His treasures in Christ—His Word and Sacraments; the feeding and nourishing of our faith on these holy things. And we're wasteful. Not only do we waste these gifts of God by how little we ourselves make use of them, we waste them by not giving them in full measure to our loved ones. Looking at this parable from the standpoint of the Law, it hurts because we all are guilty. We need to repent of our sinfulness, and we need God's help to place the highest priorities on His gifts to us of Christ's Word and Sacraments.

The good news for you is that because of Jesus Christ we can also see this parable from the standpoint of the Gospel. See Christ in the role of the dishonest manager. He places as His highest priority the securing of your eternal future, and so He cancels your debts one after another. With reckless abandon, Jesus forgives each and every debt of sin. Whatever debt you owed to God, Jesus took care of it for you. He took your place under the Law. He became the Guilty One in your place. He stood condemned in Pilate's court, though not by Pilate, but by His Heavenly Father—condemned for every sinful thought, word, and action of yours. That's why He is able to cancel your debt. He paid what you owe by His blood on the cross.

When we come before Him and He asks us: What do you owe My Father? And we confess: I am a poor, miserable sinner and I cannot pay my debt, for I deserve eternal punishment for my sins...Jesus, through the mouth of His pastor, proclaims to you: Your debt is paid in full; you are forgiven. Whatever punishment you deserve, your Savior has borne it for you. Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write "Forgiven!"

Whether you have wasted God's good gifts; whether you have not listened to His Word; whether you have been selfish with your time, and been lazy with your abilities, your debt of sin is cancelled. Jesus paid every "red" cent—His blood was shed for you. You are forgiven.

"And the master commended the dishonest manager"...And so your Heavenly Father is pleased with what Jesus has done for you. Jesus came to be your Savior because He knew something about His Father—that He is full of mercy. Normally, a business owner would be livid with anger if his manager gave away everything he owned, to people right and left, whoever would take his possessions. But God is not angry that Jesus cancelled your debt. He is not upset that Jesus gives you everything of His, because you have a merciful God. And so He is pleased that Jesus gives you His eternal home in heaven. He is pleased that Jesus gives you His holiness. He is pleased to give you faith, and baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and the Word of the Gospel, along with the peace and joy of knowing that no sin of yours can keep you away from Him, for He gives you full pardon; life and salvation are yours in Christ Jesus.

What Jesus did would appear, in the eyes of the world, to be dishonest. He gave away—to you—all of God's possessions for free! He cancelled your debt of sin so that you have to pay nothing for what you have done! Christ paid it all for you. In the world's eyes, that is underhanded, conniving, and dishonest. But to God...it's simply what He loves to do—to show mercy to sinners like us. Amen.

