

Luke 16:1-15

I've been asked, (maybe you have too), what I would do if confronted with the decision of choosing my life or my faith. There are Christians facing this dilemma right now, as there have been in every generation for the past 2,000 years. If the rebels come to power in Syria, they have sworn to kill every Christian on the spot unless they convert to Islam. Such a life-and-death decision is not here in America...yet. But if it was, what choice would we make?

Jesus' words in our text can help us answer this question. "*One who is faithful in a very little thing, is also faithful in much...*" You who are faithful in the little things, will prove to be faithful if such a grave decision is ever put before you. Coming to hear the Word of God faithfully, coming up to His Table of Grace, spending time in His Word daily--all these are little things because they take minutes in our day and just a few hours in our week. But such faithfulness in these things will keep us faithful in the end, even if we must face the sword of death in the end.

Today's text points us to the great contrast that exists between Christians who live faithfully, and those who are not of Christ. We meet a dishonest manager who is about to lose his job. Jesus calls him a "*son of this world,*" as opposed to the "*sons of light*" who are of God. This manager is very shrewd. He is cunning and knows how to work the system to his advantage. Today we will look at two things about this man: how he is similar to us, and how he is different from us.

First the similarities. He is a manager. He is not the owner of what he has. The rich man is the owner, and he has this manager in charge of his possessions. And so it is with us. Not one of us owns anything that we have. It's not "yours, mine, and ours." Everything belongs to God. We do not own our property--our wealth, our homes, our cars, not even ourselves and all that we are. God is the owner. We are simply managers here in this life. Even our time is not our own. Every minute of each day is on loan to us from God.

The manager in the parable was not going to be manager much longer. He was ordered to turn in his books. The rich man discovered that he had been wasting his possessions. He had been a poor manager. And so he was about to lose control of everything. And also for us. The day is coming when we will no longer be managers. The day we die we must turn in our books and we lose control of everything that was under our control here on earth. And we, as with the dishonest manager, will have to turn in our books because we, like him, have been poor managers. If our books were in perfect order, we would not have to turn them in. We would not die. But they're not. We, too, have been wasteful. We, too, have been selfish. We have not used our bodies, our time, our possessions in the way God commands. We are sinful, and so we must die. "*The soul that sinneth shall die.*"

Now when this truth confronted the dishonest manager, he immediately jumped into action. Being shrewd, he devised a plan to deal with what was going to take place. He still had control of his master's books, so he called in his master's debtors and he lowered their debt for them. And he did this with haste for his time as manager was short. "*Take your bill,*" he told one, "*and sit down quickly and write fifty.*" This man's debt was cut in half. To another he said, "*Take your bill (and lower it to eighty.*" This shrewd manager knew that after he lost his job and had no home, no possessions, no future, these debtors would take him in. They would repay his kindness toward them by giving him a place to live, food to eat, and a future with them.

Friends, this is where we part ways with the dishonest manager. This is where the similarities end. We who know that we will not always be managers, but that one day we must turn in our books, we do

not fret and worry about our future. We do not need to devise a plan so that we have a place to live after we die. Your future is certain. Jesus worked it all out for you.

Talk to your friends and neighbors and you will find some like the dishonest manager. They are attempting to secure their future. They are using their bodies, their time, their wealth to do good things for others so that they will be rewarded with a place in heaven when they die. Now it's true that some just don't care. They'll take their chances when the time comes. But this was not the dishonest manager, and this is not many people today. They're serious about their life, and they're serious about their future. They do not want to leave it up to fate. Like the dishonest manager, they are working the system now to get their books in order. They are striving to win God as a friend by doing kind things for others before their time here is over.

My fellow managers, Jesus already calls you His friends. Jesus is the Friend who will take you in when you are no longer a manager. You do not have to work the system, shrewdly attempting to plan for your eternal future. Your future is with Jesus. He lived and died for you. He rose again for you. He baptized you into His family. Your place is with Him now, and after you must turn in your books.

There is no future apart from Jesus. The dishonest manager had it all wrong. He was attempting to secure his future by winning friends for himself with his acts of charity. This is how most people think and live today. But a place in heaven comes not by our doing, but by what Jesus does for us. We cannot put our books back in perfect order. Our lives are a sinful mess. Yet, Jesus gives His holy life to you in your baptism. Jesus went to the cross so that now God says to you, "take your debt and write 'forgiven.'" He doesn't just cut your bill in half. He forgives it completely. Jesus did not die for some of your sins. He died for them all. He removed completely the debt you owe. You are free to live now at peace with God, for Jesus has done everything for you.

The biggest difference between the "sons of light," and the "sons of this world," is one that cannot be seen. It's in the heart. Because you are of Christ, because He lives in you giving you peace and assurance, you live in stark contrast from those who do not have this peace and assurance in Christ. They are not certain of eternal life in heaven when they die. You are. They do not know God's love, His care and concern for them. You do. They do not know that their sins are forgiven. You have this forgiveness. It's yours in the water of baptism. It's yours in the Gospel. With their eternal future uncertain, they are not free to love God as you do. They are not free to serve their neighbor as you are. It's all about Jesus and what His cross means. It should mean the same for all because He died for all. But the "sons of this world" are turning in their books without knowing Him who died for them.

Yesterday I went with my family to see the Vietnam Memorial at the Washington fairgrounds. From a distance it's just a wall. But as we came closer and closer, we could see them. Not just a wall anymore, there were names on the wall. Thousands of names. And when you get up close...real close, you can make out the names of each of the soldiers who died in the Vietnam War. That's how it is with the cross of Jesus. From a distance it's just a cross. But when you get up close...real close, you see them. Not just a cross anymore, there are names on that cross. Not the names of people who died, but the names of people for whom Jesus died. And not thousands...billions...billions. Every name is there. Not even one name is excluded. Your name is there. It's written in blood...Jesus' blood poured out for you. Your Soldier died on that cross, and now you can live with total peace and assurance. God forgives you. He is at peace with you. And your future...your future in heaven is certain. It is certain because of Jesus.

If you have a friend who has never seen the cross up close, you can take them there. You can show them their name written there. It, too, is etched in blood. They can have the same peace and assurance you have. By taking them up close to the cross of their Savior, you can win friends for the life to come. And they, too, will have a future with Jesus. Amen.