

Parents are wise in applying these words to their children. They give them small tasks to accomplish, and see how they handle them, before giving them greater tasks with greater responsibility. They will give their child a small amount of money, observing how they use it, before giving their child a larger amount of money. Parents are training their children in these ways. But they are also testing them. And they rejoice when their children pass these tests. For if they are faithful in a very little, they will also be faithful in much.

In giving us His parable of the dishonest manager, Jesus impresses upon us that God tests us in the same way that parents test their children. In the parable, the manager utterly fails the test. He handles his master's money in a selfish, dishonest manner. Knowing he is about to be fired, he reduces the bills of his master's debtors so that he will be benefited after losing his job. It is not his money. It's his master's money. But he uses it for his own personal gain.

We should not be surprised at this, says Jesus, for this is how the "sons of this world" operate. They are shrewd toward each other, selfish, and dishonest when it benefits them. The sons of this world are not the ones God tests. They are the unregenerate; those who make this world their permanent home. And of these sons of this world, it is very clear that money, not God, is their master.

You are not sons of this world. You are, as Jesus puts it, "the sons of light." Baptized into Jesus Christ, you are called out of the world to live in the light of Christ, being yourself lights that reflect Jesus by how you live. Since the sons of this world make money, and not God, their master, what should be very obvious about us is that God, and not money, is our master.

God is testing us with the money that He allows us to use, that He gives to us. He is the Heavenly Father testing His dear children. He is the rich man in the parable. We are in the position of the manager. It is not our money; it's His. It's all His. And He observes how we use it. He knows how the sons of this world use His money. They use it selfishly as if it was their own, making it their master. God wants us to pass the test, to be faithful in the little that He gives us so that we will be faithful also with the greater gifts He gives us. But do we always pass the test?

Even though you and I are not the sons of this world, in our hearts we know how often we act like them. We call ourselves Christians, and so we are, for we who belong to Jesus through Holy Baptism trust in Him as our Lord and Savior. And this trust, this faith will show itself by the way we live.

One very apparent way that faith shows itself is in how we use the money God gives us. Faith clings to Jesus and not to our money. Therefore, it should not be at all painful for you and for me to write checks to the church and to other missions that spread the good news of Jesus. This is the Lord's work, and there is no greater thing we can do with the money God gives to us than to win souls for Christ with it.

Jesus calls money “unrighteous wealth.” But we can do righteous things with it. Like the manager in the parable, we will one day be fired from our job; we will die in other words. And then we will no longer be able to use the unrighteous wealth that God has given us. The way we use it now shows our faith, and hopefully not a lack of faith. If God is our master, we will not use our money selfishly, nor will we even call it ours, but God’s. But if money is our master, then we will cling to it more than to the things of God, His Word and Sacraments. And we will only reluctantly use it for the winning of souls for Christ.

Truly this parable touches a sensitive nerve in all of us. It’s supposed to. We have all acted like the sons of this world. But this is not who you are. You are sons of light. Jesus is your master. More, He is your Savior. The way you and I use our money will not save us. It is unrighteous wealth. We are not made righteous by how we use it. This parable is a wake-up call. Have we been clinging to our unrighteous wealth more than to the Righteous One, Jesus Christ?

It is a small thing for God to bless us with unrighteous wealth. But it is everything for Him to bless us with the true riches. Jesus clung to the cross to purchase the true riches for you by His own blood. These true riches are yours in your baptism where they are freely given to you.

These true riches include, above all, the forgiveness of your sins. This is something you can truly cling to. God forgives you and me for acting like the sons of this world. He forgives you and me for being selfish with our money. Even for making money our master, God forgives you for this. Is this not reason to cling to Him and not to our money?

The Pharisees were lovers of money we’re told, and they ridiculed Jesus for His parable. You are not lovers of money. You are lovers of God because He is the lover of your soul. You can cling to Him because He clings to you and will not let you go. He passed every test for you, and He will help you with yours, and always forgive you, for Jesus’ sake, when and where you fail. Amen.