

Luke 16:1-15
Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 21, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

At first glance, it would seem that we have moved beyond last week's parables (the lost sheep, the lost coin, even the lost sons) and moved on to a new topic, with a new 'teaching focus' from our Lord. It certainly doesn't *sound* like the last three parables or anything that precedes them; those weeks, Jesus focused us on repentance, running to safety in Him, rejoicing in forgiveness, the feasting that ensues. At first glance, that all seems behind us, and now we're on to how we handle unrighteous wealth (and, here, unrighteous doesn't mean "sin-laden", sinful... it simply means "daily bread," the wealth not having to do with gaining righteousness and justification and eternal life). Yes, it seems we're on to a totally new topic.

But look at the text carefully: Notice that it begins, "He *also* said..." That would seem to connect this with what comes before, no? You might say, "But, Pastor, it says, 'He also said to *His disciples*'... meaning, a different *audience* than before." Okay, but at

the *end* of the text, whose response is recorded? The Pharisees':
"The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard *all these* things."
All *what* things? All 'this one parable'? Or all the parables, as they
were woven *together* to teach these Pharisees who, recall last week,
were the ones who grumbled that Jesus received sinners and ate
with them. Now, at the end of "all these things", these same
Pharisees ridicule Jesus, and He exposes and chastises their hearts.

So, from the text itself, we see we ought recognize this
parable as a *continuation* of sorts from those of last week. But, it
certainly doesn't *sound* like a continuation of thought. So, what are
we to learn from it, that we might come to the end of the text as we
do and hear Jesus exposing pharisaical hearts through all these
things?

Perhaps the first similarity we ought recognize is that the
manager – the shrewd, but dishonest manager – is an 'insider' with
access to all the rich man's possessions. Notice how the parable of
the lost coin, as well as the second son in the parable of the lost
sons, both coin and son were *in the house*... always 'insiders', if you
will... and yet, hearts far removed from God.

So it is with this manager, who is exposed as a fraud:
"*Charges* were brought that this man was wasting [his master's
possessions]." Isn't that the pharisaical self-righteous in the house of
God? Wasting all the treasures that are truly holy and truly rich?

Yet, in the parable, the wicked manager hatches a scheme to use all those riches for his own temporal gain. And it would seem by the end of it all that the rich man, the master, actually lauds and commends him.

This is where we begin to stumble over this. Why would the rich man commend such dishonesty? How is this really a picture of God's disposition toward the pharisees?

But, it's really a set-up, isn't it? Jesus is drawing the Pharisees in only to expose their sinful thoughts. For, as soon as the Pharisees hear that the wicked manager is commended (the wicked manager who was not strong enough to add his own 'works' to save himself by digging, was too proud to beg in repentance)... as soon as they hear that he was able to get away with it all, would they not pat themselves on the back for their dishonest, unfaithful handling of the holy things of the house of God?: "Oh, look how shrewd he was!" they could cheer, sensing it was safe for their reputation to associate with him. But then, Jesus' next sentence rings out, brings down the hammer, and condemns them: "The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light."

There's the condemnation. They're not sons of light; they're sons of this world. The pharisees may see themselves as the safe 99 sheep that need no repentance, but – what was the other half of that parable, the other *type* of sinner? – not the one who wanders away, but they're the lost coin that, though *in* the house, is lifeless;

they're the older son of the parable, who has been with his father forever, but refuses to rejoice over his brother's forgiveness; and they're really the sons of this world (or, as Jesus says elsewhere, "You are of your father, the devil!")... the sons of this world who truly *are* shrewd with earthly riches... truly set themselves up well for this life (wasn't that the Pharisees' whole goal as "lovers of money"?)... but of what good when it all *fails* and their only help is the Messiah they have rejected and even crucify?

Now, again, we can be confused a bit because Jesus even goes on and tells the sons of *light* to learn from the shrewdness of the sons of this world! But such lesson is quite simple: If they (the sons of this world) use the unrighteous wealth (daily bread) as an idol, to try and hold on to the materialism of this world and its *false* gods, should not the Christian learn to use the unrighteous wealth (again, not *sinful* wealth, but "daily bread" wealth that God even teaches us to pray for, meaning He intends to give it to us!)... should not the Christian receive it with thanksgiving and use it faithfully with an eye on eternal life? And, if *that* is the goal, then the Christian will not hoard it for himself, but share it with all his friends... Remember that word from last week, which wasn't merely "friends," but could have also been translated "beloved"? Well, guess what *this* word is, in verse 9 of our text? "Make *friends* for yourselves..."? No, φίλους – beloved! Christians who rejoice over one another, who share the feast together, who bless the Lord's name in their mutual need for

and benefit from His goodness for which they cannot pay, but they together “Come, eat and drink without price” ... those beloved care for one another, they use the unrighteous wealth to encourage and support one another as they all depend upon and rejoice in Christ’s true righteous wealth.

Against this, the Pharisees – the lovers of money that they are – how does Jesus speak to them *elsewhere*?: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees!... For you devour widows’ houses and for a pretense you make long prayers!” Yes, theirs is a show of piety, but their heart is set on the unrighteous wealth to the point of taking from widows in a way that only appears right, but is truly *devouring* them!

It’s not unlike our Old Testament reading, which begins, “Hear this, you who *trample on* the needy” ... and that could be rendered, “Hear this, you who *devour* the needy.” And, we say, “Aha! Those wicked Pharisees!”

But, Amos the undershepherd is called by God to bring repentance to *all* God’s people. In fact, it’s believed Amos proclaimed God’s Word in a situation very similar to our own society – generally wealthy, generally lovers of wealth; but in their materialistic greed, sliding away from the faith, increasingly different toward the things of God, *unethical* use of money that may be *legal* but not godly, societally-approved but not (if you will) God-approved, not holy... And, who are the victims in Amos’ day, but the

truly needy and poor...those overlooked not only in the things of unrighteous wealth, but in the things of righteous wealth.

Do we Christians shake our fists at the pharisees and *theoretically* agree that the idolatry of unrighteous wealth is a problem, then go home to our cushy way of life and not consider the truly poor? Our society has made it easier to harden our hearts, for our society's victim status of the poor has been so over-the-top that it has trained people to *abuse* that status of being poor, and then we believe we are wise to their misuse by not helping *any* poor.

But Jesus says we will always have the poor among us, not to help them as they always *want* to be helped – free handouts, free this, free that, free stuff that only engrains bad habits – but to still *help* them, to still be compassionate and help in any and every way as genuinely benefits not only in the matters of unrighteous wealth, but in the matters of the righteous wealth, Christ's true riches... *especially*, therefore, do we look to those poor in the household of faith, that all the poor Lazaruses among us will rejoice with us all, not only in the forgiveness of sins below, but in the entrance of heaven above. Such is the *faithful* use of unrighteous wealth among those who are equally children of God, no matter their monetary status.

Such faithfulness cannot even be seen or fathomed when one's heart is set idolatrously on unrighteous wealth. The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, could not even begin to understand what Jesus was teaching... for if righteousness does not include the Self,

and if the wealth of heaven does not include the treasures of earth, then the pharisees and their idolatry were as far removed from God as possible... even though they sat *in* the house.

God grant us humility to learn from Jesus calling the lifeless pharisees to repentance. After all, the woman of the parable rejoiced over the lost coin having been found, and Jesus would rejoice over even one pharisee who repents. So it is with us: we ought repent and run back to safety, for we simply cannot serve two masters; we will hate the one and love the other (a lesser/greater weigh scale that renders our love for God lighter than our love of wealth), or- even worse – we will be entirely *devoted* to the one and openly *despise* the other (and align ourselves with our very secular, materialistic society). We simply cannot serve both God *and* money.

And yet, we search our own lives, we hear the call of Amos in our own general prosperity (compared to so much of the world), and we know we have reason to repent. We have so often exalted in our hearts what is exalted among men, and it is an abomination in the sight of God. Thus, Jesus calls us back to safety: “Repent... despair of your love of earthly wealth or self-righteousness and reputation before men, and rejoice in the heavenly wealth of Christ’s forgiveness and in His righteousness covering you in the sight of God.” Such a call to repentance and forgiveness may seem *little* reason for joy, but he who is faithful in *little* will inherit *much*... and, in that forgiveness of sins that leads to eternal life, Jesus is entrusting

you with the true riches, riches that may have at one time only been another's – Christ's!, when He purchased them on the cross – but riches he now has by his testament freely *given you* as an inheritance.

And that leads to two important verses that follow this text and probably should have been included in the Reading. Jesus appeals to the Law in the earshot of those self-righteous who would try to earn their salvation by that Law... remember, that's what this is truly all about from parables ago, those who pontificated they were safe by their keeping of the Law while the rest of the nameless and faceless were condemned.(That's where this all began!) And so, Jesus appeals to their assumed self-righteousness before the Law *yet again*, and he says,

“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it” (recall, this all started with Jesus saying, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow way’... and he bookends it with this; you can imagine folks on the wide path, straining and pushing to get in through that narrow entrance, thinking themselves more worthy than the next, able to buy their way in, able to win that striving and entering)... **“But,” [Jesus says,] “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.”**

In other words, if – in this era of the Christ and His good news – you want to save yourself by your Self-righteousness (the way of the Pharisees, as Jesus has now been highlighting in these latter parables, they who saw themselves so much safer than the tax

collectors and sinners... these, Pharisees who saw themselves as without need for the Christ, 'shoe-ins' to the great feast to come)... if you want to save yourself by such self-righteous status, heaven and earth will pass away far sooner than that could ever happen! And you will miss out on everything.

You will never save yourself by trying to impress God with your holiness and thereby earn His favor; all such effort is futile. Instead, recognize that – according to His own plan of salvation – all of us sinners must hear the call to repentance... but, in Christ Jesus, we can hear that the call to repentance is a call to safety, a call to run back to the One who has fulfilled the Law for you, whose righteousness is your substitute, who – on account of His own righteousness – has authority to forgive you your unrighteousness... and that One rejoices over your forgiveness, rejoices over you, and calls together all the beloved to rejoice over each other and receive the feast of forgiveness together. *That* is, if you will, the narrow way. Heaven and earth will pass away, but Christ's Word – His Word of repentance for forgiveness and the baptismal life dependent on His gracious Word and Sacrament that flow from His cross – that Word will never pass away.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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