

Almighty God, You have set bounds to our lives on this earth that we cannot pass, grant us true wisdom, that we set not our hearts on earthly things, neither follow after mammon, but seek first Your kingdom and the righteousness of Your Son. By the operation of Your Spirit teach us to remember that we are but pilgrims on this earth, and help us to fix our hearts and hopes above where Christ sits on Your throne. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, Ps. 39, CPH, p.100)

[Jesus said:] "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." 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. 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. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void."

In Christ Jesus, the priceless treasure sent down from heaven to enrich us unto everlasting life, dear fellow redeemed:

Our text follows directly upon our Gospel lesson for today. The parable of the unjust manager often perplexes the Christian reader since Jesus appears to commend the dishonesty of the manager. Rather Jesus commends the shrewdness of the manager and calls upon all who follow Him to exercise the same craftiness in using all that He gives them in this life, but for good and out of love. Consider then this lesson from our text, which Jesus desires you to understand: **All that You Have Is Another's; Use It in Love.**

## I

Those of you who have studied this week at Family Bible School the life of that Old Testament type of Christ, Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, should recall that he approached his life of service to God in this very way. Whether at home with his father, as a slave to Potiphar, a prisoner wrongly punished, or the right hand man to Pharaoh, he showed exemplary treatment of the possessions of others. Being a type of Christ, who was perfect in all ways for us, Joseph's commendable attitude served him well in this life.

But that is hardly the main message from the story of Joseph. Yes, he was blessed in this life just as our Lord God promises those who fulfill His holy Law, but there is something that goes far beyond such temporary benefits. It is the holy One sent by the Father who blesses us for all eternity. Because even Joseph, as perfect appearing as he may seem in the accounts regarding his life recorded for us in Genesis, he also needed the holy perfect Substitute who would take his place under the Law and take his place in the punishment he deserved as a sinner.

We are all stewards of everything we have; we manage all that we have which really does not belong to us. God has gifted all things to us in this life and He calls us to use them to His glory and welfare of our neighbor. Jesus then makes this observation: "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much." The unjust steward was dishonest in the little he had and remained dishonest as he grabbed his master's wealth to improve his life of unemployment.

Jesus then goes on to say: "If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?" Unfaithfulness in this life with worldly wealth does not make one well prepared to manage the true riches of heaven. God gives us our worldly wealth to be used faithfully in our vocations as spouse, parent, child, employer, employee, etc. Faithful use will benefit our neighbor and not be squandered for personal advancement. True riches sent down from heaven to us are also not to be squandered for personal gain, while neglecting the needs of neighbor. Judas was a classic example of an abuser of the true riches he was receiving from Jesus, e.g., he abused with self-righteous condemnation Mary who anointed Jesus' feet with costly ointment, trying to feed his greed.

All that we have are God's gifts to us and as His servants we are called to use them in love to Him and our neighbors whom He loves as much as He loves us. God is the loving master whose following results in loving attitudes, words and deeds. Whereas worldly wealth, like money, is a master that calls its followers to lives of selfishness, stinginess, cruelty, dishonesty. Jesus clearly declares, you cannot serve both masters. It is one or the other you can serve.

## II

So where are you in the treatment of all that you have? Do you view the use of it in a loving way or in a self-serving way? As you are confronted with the reality of your response to what you have, you can tell which master you are serving – money or God. If you are honest with yourself you can observe your times and actions of

stinginess instead of generosity; of miserliness instead of liberal kind-heartedness; of greediness instead of contentment.

So does this mean you are lost in serving Money and not God? Have you so failed in your continual sinning in this regard that you are everlastingly cursed with no hope of life? Are you like the Pharisees in our text who loved money and ridiculed Jesus for having them stare in the mirror of His holy law, exposing their greedy unfaithfulness of all that they had? No you are not. There is a big difference. As Jesus pointed out to them, they were those who sought justification not from a gracious God, but tried by their own efforts to justify themselves before their neighbors thinking that they could thereby fool God as well. You are not like that. You trust in Christ Jesus your Savior for justification alone.

Yes, you still struggle with your sins of unfaithfulness in all that you have been given by God, but you know you are morally bankrupt and there is no way you can buy your way out of your eternal indebtedness. You trust in the God of love who sent His Son for you to live that perfect life, even in regard to all His worldly wealth using it in perfect love to neighbor. Jesus took His perfect life and sacrificed it for you and all sinners, taking the punishment for your sins of self-love suffering the eternal torments of hell for you.

In Romans 7, the Apostle Paul works his way through this same dilemma as a believer struggling with his sin. He especially confronts the sin of coveting. He says: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." "I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." Does that sound familiar? Yes, this is the experience of all Christians, servants of God, not another master like money.

Paul had been a Pharisee before becoming a Christian and he knew firsthand what it was like to love money and was also tortured trying to justify himself. But when he wrote the words in Romans 7 speaking of this same struggle with serving another master, he found the resolution not in himself, but in Christ alone. Trusting in Christ as Savior there is no condemnation, for Christ was condemned in his place and he is now justified. So it is for you, my fellow sinners.

Now you get to love God and neighbor using all that you have been given in this life, not to justify yourself but to give glory to the One who has justified the wicked. What God accomplished for you and me and all people through His Son was not to abolish the holy Law, no, it remains intact for all eternity. But in His Son we have been set free from our sin, forgiven completely. We are set free

faithfully to use all that we have in service to our Lord and His kingdom.

How we manage all that we have been given in this life is no small matter. Review how you are using it, but do not despair, for you know and trust in Christ your Savior. You possess more than your body and life in this world, you possess life everlasting right now for Jesus' sake. No longer are you a wretched person, a servant of the unloving master of money, but an eternally justified person with sins all forgiven dressed in Jesus' holy life, a pure servant of the eternal gracious God. To Him be all the glory for Jesus' sake. Amen.