

“Our Master is Merciful”

Luke 16:1-13

Jesus' Parable of the Unrighteous Manager is a difficult story to figure out at its first reading. Here you have someone who misuses the property of his master, gets fired, but before he cleans out his desk he gives away some of the master's property, and the master commends him for his actions. What is going on? That is not the way the world works.

To view the parable from the viewpoint of the unrighteous manager leads only to confusion. We need to look at the parable from the lord and master's perspective.

The manager was like any of us, our Lord and Master has given us charge over people for which we are to look out for their best interest, and over property and income that we are to use to His glory. Like the manager in the parable, we misuse what the Lord has given us. We dream of acquiring wealth and influence. We think about how we can increase our bank account, or impress our neighbors, keep up with the Jones's, have the newest car, or the newest video games or whatever else we just have to have. We work to attain social status. The fight for prestige and honor which comes in many and various forms.

All activity that focuses on your self is a misapplication of the gifts of God. Like that manager, we have been given one purpose in life: to serve our Lord and Master for His good – not our own. Whatever benefit we receive is a byproduct of our good stewardship meant for the benefit of others.

Like us, the manager was a bad manager, a poor steward of the gifts of God. He did not use what the master had given him for the good of the master or for the good of others, but was wasteful. So the master calls him in and says: “What is this I hear about you? Turn in an account of your management.” Tell me exactly how you have used the gifts I have given you.

What if our Lord and Master came and said that to any of us today: “Give me an account of your management”? He has said that to each of us. That is what God’s Law does.

So this manager, who has come under the wrath and judgment of his master, deliberates about his future. Very typically, his first reaction is to approach the crisis from a human point of view. Our first inclination is to ask, “What can I do to get myself out of the mess I has caused?”¹ Actually, our first inclination is to ask “What can I do to get myself out of the mess I am in?” We tend to avoid placing the blame on ourselves. But he soon realizes that neither digging nor begging is the answer. Nothing within his

¹Just, *Luke*, 615.

power is going to solve this problem.

In the third verse of our first Communion hymn #555 “Salvation Unto Us Has Come,” we are reminded that it is a false, misleading dream that sinners could redeem themselves or work their way into heaven through the Law of God.

The purpose of the Law is crush us and reduce us down to our proper status of complete helplessness apart from the mercy and grace of God. Like the prodigal son, who was reduced to desiring to eat the pig’s food, upon being shown his sin, the manager, in our parable today, hits bottom. There is nothing he can do to save himself – there seems no escape from this crisis.

The manager’s great insight is that he sees the only solution to be from outside himself. His entire plan is based on his assumption that the master is an honorable man who will respond in mercy – as he has done in the past. The manager works quickly and offers his master’s debtors some adjustments to their accounts, so as to win their favor.

Does it surprise you that those in debt to this wealthy man didn’t question the manager’s changes? These people in debt to the master are ready and willing to believe that this generosity comes from the master himself, because he is known to be an honorable man who is generous, merciful, and giving to those who are need. They know this wealthy man as one who has sacrificed of himself for the good of others. The community is dependent on the generous and merciful lord, and has come to expect this

sort of mercy from him.

When the manager adjusts the books, the people are not surprised and the master has two choices: he can change them back and demand what is owed him, or he can allow the changes to stand as a generous gift to those in his care. For the wealthy man of honor, the choice is easy. The only choice is to be consistent with his generous, merciful character. And although the manager had been deceitful and wasteful of the money and possessions entrusted to his care, the master even commends the manager for shrewdly managing his personal crisis by trusting in the character of the master and staking everything on the his mercy.

This is our story. We misuse the property, the money, and the time with which our Lord and Master has entrusted us, but our Master is honorable and is willing to be generous, merciful, and even sacrifice that which He loves most on our behalf. We are right to stake everything on that mercy.

I am continually overwhelmed by the grace of God. Our Father in heaven loves His Son Jesus Christ more than any earthly father could ever love a son. But in an act of shear mercy, He was willing to send His Son to His death on the altar of the cross to cancel the entire debt of all of us who owed Him more than we could ever pay.

Our Master has taken our account, and has not merely cut it in half (as was done in the parable), but He has written with Christ's blood "Paid in full." Amen.