

Making Friends By Means of Unrighteous Wealth

Trinity 9
Luke 16:1-13

#1107
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In the opinion of many people, today's Gospel gives one of the most difficult parables of our Lord Jesus. On the surface it sounds as though our Lord is commending the dishonest manager for his dishonesty. But that is not at all the case! Instead, Jesus commends the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. Yes, there is a difference, a big one. You see, the manager took a realistic evaluation of his situation and did what he could to ensure his own temporal welfare. He made sure that when he was fired from his job, he'd have friends who would be ready and willing to welcome him into their homes.

Jesus discloses His point for us when He says, *"For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."*

In other words, Jesus says, "Take a lesson from the world's playbook. Sure, the world is all wrong in its assumptions, but look at how dedicated the people of the world are to their own goals of having an easy life and heaping up the dough. Now," Jesus says, "YOU be just as dedicated toward the ends of the Kingdom."

So, let's stop and think about it this way. God blesses us with wealth, but not so that we can pretend that it belongs to us. That's what the children of the world think and do. We, however, are children of light, and we know better. We know that there is not a single thing that we possess that we can really call our own. Every last one of us merely manages the possessions and wealth that belong to Another, to the true Rich Man, to Jesus Christ. Everything we have really belongs to Him, because *"The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and all who dwell therein"* (Ps. 24:1). So, we, the children of light, are managers one and all. And as is true for any manager, one day we all will have to give

an account for what we've done with His things.

And our Lord is very clear on how He wants us to use His possessions. He wants us to use them support and promote the spread of His Gospel, His Good News, to the ends of the world. He also wants us to use the wealth we receive from Him to alleviate the sufferings and hardships of those who are poorer and more disadvantaged than we are. He wants us to invest the stuff that He gives in bringing blessing—both spiritual and physical—to others around us.

To do this, we must trust. We must trust that all of the stuff, possessions, and wealth are His to begin with. We must trust that our gracious Lord will continue to supply our daily needs, so that we need not hoard against tomorrow. We must trust that tomorrow is entirely in His hands, and on one of those tomorrows we will be called from this life to stand before His throne. And do you know what? Every one of us will leave this world carrying out exactly as much as we brought into it: not one, single, solitary, blessed thing! As St. Paul told young Pastor Timothy, *"we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world"* (1 Tim. 6:7). But when we stand before our Lord's throne, He will call us to account for how we've handled what He entrusted to us in our time in this world.

How blessed we will be on that day, if, as we stand before the throne, person after person stands up and says: "Lord Jesus, he helped me when no one else would. He gave me food and drink when I had none. Please, welcome him into Your feast!" Or another might stand and say: "Lord Jesus, I am here today basking in Your glory because she supported the preaching of the Gospel of Your life and salvation. As a result, I came to hear of Your great sacrifice on the Cross and Your glorious victory over death. I came to trust that You have taken away the sins of the world, even mine, and that You bring life and immortality

to light. She supported that preaching; welcome her home!” And another might say: “Lord Jesus, I remember feeling so down and alone, and that person noticed. He came and spent time with me. He listened to me and prayed with me. He shared Your words with me and gave me new hope. Welcome him home!” You get the idea.

On that day of accounting, we won't be surrounded by our stuff. But we will be surrounded by the people whom we have blessed or abandoned in their need. Which will it be?

Now, don't misunderstand. Our Lord is not suggesting that we can earn our way into His heavenly home by the use of His goods. God forbid! Put that notion out of your heads and hearts completely! HE, and HE alone, has won and given the right for us to share in His heavenly home. He who never mismanaged anything entrusted to Him by His Father, but rather offered His entire life as one great sacrifice to God, has wiped out the debt of our sin. He has restored the joy of being beloved children of the heavenly Father to all who believe and are baptized. He alone has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers by His suffering, dying, and rising again.

So, while we need not earn our way into His heavenly home, believing does have its fruit. Believing is not just a matter of the heart. It also breaks forth out of the heart and shows itself in the deeds of our lives. As the hymn writer Paul Speratus said so well, “Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone / And rests in Him unceasing; / And by its fruits true faith is known. / With love and hope increasing. / For faith alone can justify; / Works serve our neighbor and supply / The proof that faith is living” (LSB 555:9).

And so those people who surround us on the Day of Judgment, when they point to the good we did to them and urge Christ to welcome us into the heavenly home, they are not saying that our deeds earned us what Christ freely gives. Rather, they are simply testifying to the fact that we truly believed, that we truly trusted Christ Jesus to provide for our every

temporal need, just as He always provides for our every spiritual need. They are confessing that our lives were changed and enlivened by the trust that freed our hands to open up in blessing rather than clench shut in fear. You see, when we give of ourselves and of the stuff that belongs to God, we testify to the fact that in Christ we find a life that is more than we ever need for ourselves. And we are not merely managers; we are managers for the Lord who is our Brother. That makes us co-heirs with Him of all His Father's riches. And when we trust this, then we can be very generous in managing and giving out what has been entrusted to us. In this way we make friends by means of unrighteous wealth.

Remember this when you come to the Table today. Here, at this very Table, your Lord Jesus again gives you more than you'll ever need. He gives you His Body and Blood for forgiveness – forgiveness for all the times that you've doubted and distrusted Him to provide for you, forgiveness for all the times that you've mistakenly thought that His money and stuff belong to you instead, forgiveness for not freely giving to His Church to proclaim His Gospel and for not giving generously for those in need. He also gives you His Body and Blood for life – a life strengthened in the faith that bursts forth in a life of love. In that life of love you grow in sharing with others more and more. You grow in confidence that when you have life in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you always have more than you'll ever need for time and eternity.

Yes, *“This God—his way is perfect,”* even as He exhorts us to make friends by means of unrighteous wealth. *“The word of the LORD proves true,”* because He makes us His children of the light to manage His property and wealth with shrewdness. *“He is a shield for all those who take refuge in him,”* even as we learn and grow in giving to support His Gospel and to help those in need. Amen.