

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 15

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A heavenly lesson learned from a worldly person

-Luke 16:1-13

¹Jesus also said to his disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager who was accused of wasting his possessions. ²The rich man called him in and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you can no longer be manager. ³“The manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, since my master is taking away the management position from me? I am not strong enough to dig. I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from my position as manager, people will receive me into their houses.’ ⁵“He called each one of his master’s debtors to him. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶He said, ‘Six hundred gallons^[a] of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write three hundred.’ ⁷Then he said to another, ‘How much do you owe?’ And he said, ‘Six hundred bushels^[a] of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and write four hundred and eighty.’ ⁸“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the children^[a] of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation^[a] than the children of the light are. ⁹I tell you, make friends for yourselves with unrighteous *mammon*,^[a] so that when it runs out, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings. ¹⁰The person who is faithful with very little is also faithful with much. And the person who is unrighteous with very little is also unrighteous with much. ¹¹So if you have not been faithful with unrighteous *mammon*, who will entrust you with what is really valuable? ¹²If you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you something to be your own? ¹³No servant can serve two masters. Indeed, 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 both God and *mammon*.”

I guess you are familiar with 'canceling' a person. In recent years, this concept has grabbed people's attention. Whether it is for past sins, current actions, or deeply held beliefs, it seems that every year there is another list of celebrities, influencers, and politicians that the Twitter mobs have attempted to 'cancel.'

The goal of such 'canceling' is to silence the individual. The masses believe that certain individuals' actions, words, or beliefs are so bad that they should no longer be allowed in the public eye. As Christians, we may understand this if it is due to horrific actions committed by the individual. There are earthly consequences to sin. We may question if there is any room for forgiveness in the minds of the Twitter mobs, though.

The interesting thing about 'canceling' an individual is it often does not work. Instead, these actions bring more attention to that person. Even when the person's social media privileges are taken away, the individual can still communicate and influence others.

My intention here isn't to discuss the validity of cancel culture, though. You know the concept. Some people are too bad to listen to. Some people have done bad enough things that we cannot see merit in their actions. Some people need to be gone from the public eye. This is the view of our society.

This is why Jesus' parable is so shocking. Jesus tells a story about an unrighteous man. Then Jesus doesn't do the expected thing. Jesus doesn't say do away with such people. Instead, Jesus says to look at the unrighteous man as an example. Jesus gives us **a heavenly lesson learned from a worldly person.**

Let's consider the story that Jesus told. The example that Jesus used was a man whose job was to be the manager of a rich man's estate. We were not told what the manager had done, but we saw that he was accused of wasting his master's possessions. This charge seemed to be true. The manager was apparently guilty of negligence in his work.

Knowing that he would lose his job, the manager considers what his option would be following this. First, he decides he will not dig holes for a living because he is not strong enough. Next, he decides he won't beg for money because he is too proud to do that.

I bet you are currently wondering why Jesus is holding this character off as a positive example. This man is not a positive example. He is losing his job because he was wasteful. Now, he won't just pick himself up by his own bootstraps... or sandal straps... and get a new job. So what if he isn't strong? A hard job is better than no job, right? Also, is he too proud to beg on the streets, or is he too proud to look to friends and family for assistance? This guy doesn't seem like a good example.

Before he lost his job, this man decided that he would make actions with his master's clients that would be beneficial for him. This was likely a sharecropping situation. So, the soon-to-be former manager figured he would cut a deal

with these sharecroppers. If he did this, after he has lost his job, these people would "pay him back" and be friendly to him. They would open their homes to him if he cut a deal with these people.

Again, is this a man to hold up? Instead of working hard and finding a new job, this manager planned to be dishonest with the master's possessions and money. How was Jesus pointing to this person?

So, the manager began to cut deals with the clients of the master. And think about that for a moment. He gave unapproved discounts to these people. For the first man, the manager slashed his debt in half. The manager took away 20% of his debt for the second man.

Perhaps you have gone to Circle K, and the cashier gave you a free soda. This manager's actions weren't something small like that. This manager was making big deals with people. He was doing this knowing that he would lose his job. He was doing this with someone else's wealth, not his own. Again, we may consider how we could **learn a heavenly lesson from this worldly man.**

It is good to point out that Jesus was not holding up all of this man's actions as examples for us. That is also a good lesson for us regarding Jesus' parables. When Jesus tells a parable, we must look to the main point of comparison. The main point of comparison that Jesus held up as exemplary for us is seen in how the master commended the unrighteous manager.

The master commended the manager for being shrewd in his financial transactions. This unrighteous manager was thinking about the future. He then made decisions that would benefit himself and others in the future. This man used worldly wealth to make himself friends. Then, the friends would welcome him into their homes. Being shrewd and future-minded regarding money is what Jesus holds up as exemplary for his disciples. Jesus taught **a good lesson from this bad person.**

The key to Jesus' lesson was what he said in verse nine. There Jesus said, "*I tell you, make friends for yourselves with unrighteous mammon so that when it runs out, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings.*" This verse is important, yet it may seem confusing at first. What does Jesus mean? What does he mean by unrighteous mammon? What does he mean by eternal dwellings? It seems that the best way to understand this verse is that Jesus is encouraging us to use our worldly wealth for the sake of the gospel ministry. When this is done, the people who hear and believe will be there in heaven with us.

So what is unrighteous mammon? Mammon is an Aramaic word with potential Hebrew roots. The concept of this word is worldly wealth. Mammon includes more than just money, but all of one's worldly wealth and possessions. It seems that the word may be connected to a concept of the undue trust that people put into worldly wealth. Jesus calls it unrighteous, not because money is inherently evil. Instead, Jesus contrasted that which truly deserves to be the object of our trust, God, and that which doesn't, earthly wealth.

In Jesus' parable, **a heavenly lesson is learned from a worldly person.** This lesson is to be wise stewards of the wealth that God has given us. Certainly, we are to be wise stewards for the sake of the gospel ministry. This is the **heavenly lesson learned from a worldly person.**

How does this kind of forward-thinking stewardship work? May I suggest the following scenario to consider. Let's say you have a neighbor who is an unbeliever. Perhaps, you could establish a plan to invite this neighbor over for dinner once per month. Your family is typically feasting on Little Caesar's on Friday night. Yet, to establish a good experience, you decide you will have your neighbor over for a steak dinner instead. Now, I know that finances can be tight. So, to establish this pattern of inviting your neighbor over for dinner and eating steak instead of Little Caesars, you will need to work with your budget. Perhaps, you will say no to some personal desire; maybe you will let your old shoes last an extra couple of months. Perhaps, you could switch from getting coffee at Starbucks to enrolling in the Sip 'n Save program at Circle K. You will make these conscious and shrewd budgetary decisions so that you can sustain the program of hosting dinner at your house once per month. Now, in this scenario, you take advantage of the opportunity. You share with your neighbor the gospel of Jesus. You use your worldly wealth so that this neighbor can, God willing, join you in heaven.

So, are you shrewd with your finances? Do you make wise decisions with your time and money? Do you have a budget? These may seem like interesting questions for your pastor to ask, but Jesus encourages us to be savvy with our wealth.

Are you ever wasteful with what God has given you? Perhaps, you don't consider the budget and make that purchase that you should not have. You can apply this to yourself no matter what your income is. Perhaps for you,

the wasteful purchase was a burger at McDonald's. Perhaps for you, the wasteful purchase was a car that you couldn't afford. Perhaps for you, the wasteful purchase came to the tune of thousands of dollars.

Now, don't get me wrong. I am not saying that you cannot purchase things that make you happy. I am not saying that the trips to Crumble Cookie need to stop. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon reminds us that our ability to purchase things with the wealth of our work is a gift of God. Solomon wrote, "*Likewise, for everyone to whom God has given wealth and riches, if God has also given him ability to eat from it, to enjoy his reward, and to rejoice in the results of his hard work—this is a gift of God.*" (Ecclesiastes 5:19)

The problem is not enjoying the blessings that God gives in this life. The solution is not pinching every last penny. Instead, we must reflect on and recognize the sinful intentions behind our financial transactions. What were our priorities behind the swipes of the card or taps of the phone? If we were selfish in such transactions, that is sin. If we are wasteful, that is sin. If we were not shrewd and future thinking, that too is sin.

If you have sinned in your dealings with money, as I have. If you have failed to establish a budget or follow it, as I have. If you have been selfish with your finances, as I have. You and me, we must repent.

Then, let us look to Jesus, our Savior. Jesus was shrewd with future intentions for you. Jesus forsook self-interested desires for you. Jesus lived in near poverty for you. Jesus did all of this for you. He did this by living a perfect life in your place. He was your substitute in life and death. Jesus gave it all for you. Jesus generously gave his life for you. In Jesus, all your sins are forgiven. You are forgiven even for being wasteful and selfish with your worldly wealth. In Jesus, you receive riches far greater than you can imagine. You receive the eternal riches of heaven.

Now moved by the selfless love of Jesus, you are motivated to use your worldly wealth selflessly and shrewdly. You can order your finances to give, first and foremost, back to the God who so generously has given to you. You can give for the sake of the gospel ministry. You can use your finances to make friends in this life who might become friends for eternity. This is **the heavenly lesson learned from a worldly person**. Amen.