

Faithful In The Little Things
Luke 16:9-13

The parable that we have been studying here in Luke chapter 16, at a first reading, can have an odd sound to it. And yes, perhaps even at a second or a third reading also. That's because this parable does not follow the usual pattern of most of the parables given by our Lord.

Within the words of this parable is a fundamental principle that is so very, very important, a principle that can get lost if we concentrate our thoughts on some of the finer details of the parable.

The over-arching fundamental principle has to do with "integrity", the "Godly Integrity" and the "Moral Character" that our Lord requires us to have as we deal with all the matters of our daily life, the faithfulness that is needed as we involve ourselves within even the smallest of those matters. Here, summarized in verse 13 of this passage, Jesus tells us that,

¹³ 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 mammon." (Luke 16:13)

Here in the parable given in this passage, our Lord uses the example of money, the world's mammon, to illustrate the ever so important need for "Integrity" in every matter of daily life, and yes, the "highest of integrity" in even the smallest and most insignificant of those matters.

And also, may we begin by reminding ourselves that our "natural minds" are simply not able to comprehend the deeper things of our Lord. As we are told in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, our "natural minds" do not have the ability to discern the Spiritual truths of God. Spiritual Truths are from a realm of understanding that is beyond our human abilities to comprehend, understanding that is only able to be discerned by God's Holy Spirit who dwells within those of us who have given our hearts to the Lord Jesus as our Savior. And His Spirit then ministers that understanding to our spirit.

So then, with God's Holy Spirit to instruct and to inform our minds, let's again study these words carefully. And let's ask God's Holy Spirit to explain to our spirit what He wants us to know about these truths. And especially, what He wants us to know about the "Godly Integrity" and the "Moral Character" that we should

have as we deal with all the matters that come before us each day, even and especially the smallest of matters.

Listen again as I read this parable beginning in verse 1 of chapter 16,

¹ He (the Lord Jesus) said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. ² And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' ³ And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg.

⁴ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' ⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷ Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' ⁸ The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. ⁹ 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.

¹⁰ "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. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³ 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." (Luke 16:9-13)

In John chapter 17, as Jesus was making His final preparations to suffer death on the cross and then to return back to heaven, He prayed a very special prayer for His disciples. In His prayer, Jesus prayed especially that as His disciples remained behind in the world, in amongst the trials and temptations of daily life, that God the Father would place a special hedge of protection about them. And that as these disciples went about furthering the gospel message He had

begun, God the Father would preserve and sanctify and keep them from the wiles of the world and from satan, the evil one.

Listen to those words. Jesus said,

¹⁵ (Father) I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. (John 17:15-17)

From the very beginning, it was the full intention of our Lord to not only come into this world to die on the cross to save men and women's souls from sin, but to also put into place the beginnings of what would become a far-reaching worldwide church, both visible and invisible. A church that would not only carry on forward the good news of salvation into all the generations, but would also show forth life patterns of conduct and behavior that would bear witness of the Godly moral character and integrity that our Lord desired for the people He had created.

And it was these disciples who were chosen to be the foundation of that new church. And as with all foundations, it would be imperative that both their message and their lifestyle be a trustworthy witness to all who would see their conduct and their behavior.

The words of His prayer asked that God would keep satan a reasonable distance from them. Yes, satan would be allowed to "sift them as wheat" as Jesus warned Peter would take place, but satan would be allowed to go no further.

And thankfully, that prayer that Jesus prayed was not only for His disciples then, but was also for you and me now. We, just as His disciples then, do remain within this world and we are subject to all of its temptations and its "siftings as wheat". And as we walk in amongst the wiles and the schemes of this world, God truly is protecting us.

But there is also a strong warning being given throughout these scriptures, that along with God's protection, you and I must also do our part.

We are exhorted throughout these scriptures that, to the extent we are able, we are to keep ourselves from the entanglements and the obvious sin that lurks within this world.

I say all of this as a preface to the words that Jesus spoke here in this parable of the “Unjust Steward” telling His disciples about the manner in which they should deal with their handling of the world's wares, the “unrighteous mammon”.

Recall also a statistic that I mentioned to us in an earlier study, that more than 50% of the parables and examples that our Lord gave to us in these gospels had, in some way or another to deal with matters of money and finance. And that fact tells us that our Lord knows our hearts and He knows how we are often tempted with our desires for money and the things it can buy.

Those words of this parable again,

⁹ And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

¹⁰ He who is faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much.

¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*?

¹² And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

¹³ No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Luke 16:9-13)

Again, as Jesus prayed in His prayer there in John 17, these disciples would be required to live within and to respond wisely to the common matters of daily life that take place within this very crooked and depraved generation of people. And as we see within this example that our Lord is giving here in this parable, much of our daily life experiences will have to do with the handling of money and all the temptations that go along with that task.

Here, the Lord Jesus describes the financial matters of this world using the expression, “unrighteous mammon”. Not because wealth, in itself, is unrighteous, but because wealth is often obtained through and then used in unrighteous ways, especially at the expense of other, less clever sojourners encountered along our daily path.

Consider the simplicity of such unrighteous gain for just a moment. A store owner simply increases the price of one or more of his products. Or an electrician or plumber quotes a higher price for his services. A salesman factors in a higher commission on the product or service he is selling.

Folks, those kinds of transactions take place every moment of every day and by common ordinary folks just like you and me. And yes, often and unfortunately so, it really is you and me.

Perhaps some, or even most of those increases are necessary, but the gain is still at the expense of some other needy soul just like you and me. And that is one of the things that Jesus is warning us about.

The basic flaw within this sort of conduct is in our misunderstanding of who really owns the products or the services we sell or use. They are not really ours to manipulate or to misuse for our own gain. As this parable reminds us, we are “stewards” over them, not the true owner, never the true owner.

All of those things are ever and always the property of God and God alone. He has simply placed them within our charge for us to distribute to the needy at a cost and convenience that will bless both them and us. Any use or misuse beyond those boundaries violates the trust that God has placed in us. It is as simple as that!

And here also, Jesus makes reference to worldly wealth as “unrighteous mammon”. That’s because those who trust in it for satisfaction and happiness will certainly be deceived. Riches truly are perishing things, and will disappoint those who place their expectations in them.

But again, as we said in our study last week, this is a very “thin line” that we walk as we participate in the use of the “worldly mammon”. It really is no sin to “make friends” with the earthly financial systems, the daily business world. And it is not, in itself an ungodly act to gain earthly riches from them. It is no sin to become very rich in worldly possessions.

To the contrary, on many occasions within these scriptures God exhorts us to make wise investments, and to make wise use of the things of this life.

But it really is a very “thin line” that we walk as we invest in and as we use the world’s mammon. That was the reason Jesus saw the need to pray His special prayer for us.

So then, as we “make friends” with the methods of this world and the financial systems in it, we are to be very, very careful in our conduct and in our behavior, else we will allow ourselves to be tempted beyond that which God offers protection against.

And here in these words, Jesus also clearly warns us that our potential failure will often begin within even the very smallest of things, within some of the most seemingly insignificant of decisions. Verse 10,

¹⁰ He who is faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much. (Luke 16:10)

The business profession that I was involved in most all of my working life has required that I manage financial matters, first as a banker, with cash all around me every day, and then as the keeper of the financial matters for the ministry there at French Camp.

And from the earliest moments of my work life, temptation has come at every turn. And even though in those earliest days, I was not a believer, looking back, I now know that God was still preserving my “integrity” all through my many temptations.

And again, as Jesus tells us here, failure of integrity will most often begin with the very smallest of temptations.

With that in mind, may I recall for you, a story that I have shared with you on other occasions, but that I believe is appropriate to this warning given here by Jesus.

As my story goes, in those first days of my banking career, my job was a very simple one. I would walk to each of the bank teller windows and collect the deposits and checks that they had received from customers. No cash was to come along with the items I gathered, only checks and deposits. Cash remained with the teller.

But within my first few days of doing that task, as I sorted through the items I had collected, I found a crisp twenty dollar bill mixed into the batch. With what seemed to be a long time of my staring at that twenty dollar bill and considering that no one would know if I put it into my pocket, I came up with a firm decision that I would live with all the rest of my banking career.

And that decision was that I was going to be around money every day and that I would need to understand and accept that none of it was mine and that it was simply just another piece of paper. So, I immediately took the twenty dollars back to the teller, and she was so very glad that I had found it, otherwise she would have been out of balance for the day.

It was a simple decision, but an important one that defined my attitude towards money for all my days since. And because of that one decision, God has blessed me in that I have not had to wrestle with that particular temptation anymore.

And again, looking back, though I was not a believer at the time, I know that it could only have been the unction of the Holy Spirit that guided my simple decision.

Twenty dollars! Yes, twenty dollars was worth a lot more in 1966 than it is today, but in the bigger picture of a whole lifetime, that was a very, very small amount of money.

And here, Jesus is giving a strong warning to you and me that we must be ready to deal firmly with those very small temptations, because that is where our troubles will begin.

In another place in these scriptures, Jesus warned that a very small amount of leaven can leaven a whole lump of dough.

And we know that it only takes one small match to destroy an entire forest of trees.

And it only takes a flirting glance to destroy your marriage and your family and your children's lives.

It only takes a small movement within our integrity to cause us to consider our own needs over and above another person's needs. And here in these words of this parable, our Lord is admonishing us to always be faithful in even the smallest of things.

On one occasion in recent years, our banker for some of our accounts of the ministry where I worked was asked to make some investments on our behalf. The choice they made considered two similar investments, but one of those investments would also net them, the bank, a higher profit. And they chose that investment.

That was a seemingly small movement beyond the line of integrity, but it was still a violation of the faith that we had placed in them as a fiduciary. And we called them to account for their misbehavior.

If your doctor has a choice of prescribing two otherwise equal prescription medications, but by prescribing one over the other, he makes extra money from the drug manufacturer, then he too has crossed that thin line of integrity and has sold his soul for a very small price.

If I am asked to speak at a church that will have a small number of people in attendance and I allow that small number to influence me or even discourage me, then I have violated the trust that God has placed in me.

And yes, I confess that I can get twinges of discouragement at those times. But it is the scriptural warnings such as these that bring me back to the reality of Christ's words. I must be just as fervent and diligent and faithful to preach a strong and solid gospel message to even the smallest of crowds.

And one other, even further consideration. I must never shy away from preaching about one matter or another for fear that it might offend a particular person in attendance. If I do that, then I have violated this warning by Jesus. Even the smallest deviation from the truth of these words because of fear that I might offend someone violates the calling and the trust God has placed upon my preaching. I must be as faithful in the little things as I am in the bigger things.

Folks, integrity is no small matter. In God's sight, integrity is a very, very important standard. And with these and other warnings like them, Jesus is telling you and

me to be very, very faithful with all that He places within our charge, even the smallest of those things.

One more thought before we close today . . . “worldly mammon” is the means through which we manage and pay for all the obligations we have in this life. And yes, one of those obligations is our response to our Lord’s command that we give a small portion of our income back to Him and to His church.

Ten percent is a small amount as compared to the ninety percent our Lord allows us to keep. And yes, I know how so many of us Christians foolishly quibble about whether we as New Testament Christians are still required to “tithes”. But let me assure you and me that this is a very important matter to our Lord. And yes, it extends on past the Old Testament requirements of the Law.

The amount that we are to give to the furtherance of the Kingdom of God, whether we call it a “tithes” or not, though it be small is one of those “small” things that Jesus warned us about here in these words. And yes, yes, yes, we must be faithful in this very small thing, this “tithing” of the “worldly mammon” that our Lord has given to us.

As we are clearly told in the Book of Malachi, all that we receive, and think that we own, really belongs to our Lord. We are only His “stewards” over it and we really and absolutely must be faithful to know who our Master is and to make sure that what is His always remains “His”, and never “ours”. We can’t “beg”, “borrow” or “steal” from it. It is ever and always the property of our Lord, and if we ever do “beg”, “borrow” or “steal” it, He will surely call us to stand before Him and give an account of our “stewardship” over His property. And we will surely receive the due consequences for our sinful misbehavior.

So then, dear fellow Christian, be a “faithful steward” for your Master, our Lord Jesus, and give to Him all that is due to Him . . . and yes, even more. Our Lord will reward us for our faithfulness.

His words again . . .

¹⁰ He who is faithful in *what is least* is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is least* is unjust also in much. (Luke 16:10)

Pray with me.

