

We Will Serve Somebody  
Luke 16:13

Some years ago, the singer-songwriter Bob Dylan seemed to be pondering his own life and his own eternity when he wrote and sang a song "You Gotta Serve Somebody". In that song, he kept bemoaning the same refrain, "It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna serve somebody". And that same truth is being given to us here in the scripture text that we'll study today.

As you know, for some weeks now, we have been studying through this parable about the "Unjust Steward", about how this man lusted after his master's property and money, recklessly squandering it for his own benefit.

And now, here in verse 13, we are brought to these final few words from our Lord where He tells us simply that . . .

<sup>13</sup> 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 16:13)

Simply put, these words should prompt some questions within the heart of every Christian. The questions . . . "Who am I going to serve in the daily matters of this life? What are the dreams and the desires that my heart chases after? Is it the world and all that the world has to offer, or is it the person and the things of the Lord Jesus?"

And folks, the answer to those questions really will define and reveal who we will become both in this life and in our eternity to come, because we really will "serve somebody".

But before we begin to consider these last few words of instruction from our Lord given here in verse 13, may we first pause and recall some of the other truths that we've learned so far from the words of this parable?

First of all, this steward in this parable was unfaithful in his conduct toward his master and unfaithful in the manner with which he managed his master's money and his property. To say that he acted as if his master's property was his own, and as if he had the privilege of doing anything he pleased with it, would be true. But even worse, it seems that his every intent was for his own personal gain, and even to what appears to be a complete disregard for his master's benefit

in these matters. Instead of being a good servant to his master, he chose to serve himself and his own interests.

It's interesting to note here that as our Lord gave us these parables, He especially tied the behavior of this "Dishonest Steward" to the behavior of the "Prodigal Son" given to us in an earlier parable, in that he used the same word to describe how both of these men misused the money they received, describing both of their behaviors as "recklessly squandering" the money, bespeaking an extreme foolishness within the personality of each of these men.

And that kind of personality seems prevalent within so many of the men of our day, men who have gained large sums of money quickly, perhaps through sports or the stock market or some other means, only to suddenly later on find themselves bankrupt.

Wisdom in the handling of money does not come easily. And that seems to be one of the instructions that our Lord is giving to us here in these words of these parables. Lust has a way of clouding our judgment.

With this dishonest steward, when his dishonesty was discovered, he quickly employed shrewdness in hopes of assuring his survival after he was forced to leave the comforts of his position.

Again, not surprisingly, similar kinds of behaviors are common within our modern day workplace. And even worse, in many ways, in the business world of today such behaviors are considered acceptable practices, and even encouraged, especially in the corporate world where the "master" is not just one person who holds us accountable, but rather the "master" is many thousands of faceless stockholders spread across America and across the world.

Corporate managers, CEOs and Chairmans of the Boards of all sized corporations regularly use manipulation, of both people and money. And they manipulate product manufacturing and sales as if they owned it all personally and as if they had complete freedom to do with it all as they pleased.

And their decision making and behavior is said to be guided by one all important measurement, "the bottom line".

And again, there is no inherent wrong in making a profit through business. That is what a business is supposed to do, and that is how it is able to continue to exist.

But problems within those business structures can begin to surface as those corporate managers apply many of their shrewd business practices. One such practice is the use of built-in incentive plans, such as bonuses and stock options and other kinds of personal gain enticements that keep the shrewd managers always reaching for more.

And those incentive programs are not just at the top of the management structure, they are laced throughout many levels of the organizations perpetuating the shrewdness down the ladder of management, insuring that shrewd behaviors will continue on and on.

And again, those kinds of management techniques are not only considered very acceptable in many of today's workplaces, they are actually also encouraged. That "shrewdness" is well seen in such national markets as "Hedge Funds", markets that are specifically designed to make a profit even while other business markets are experiencing great difficulties.

And yes, all those many kinds of business markets can produce a profit . . . until one day, for one reason or another, they don't . . . they don't! And the profit-taking comes to a sudden, and often devastating halt.

And yes, that sudden halt in profitability can be brought on by any number of causes, very often resulting from what the business world calls "threats". In business terminology, "threats" are events and circumstances that a business has little or no control over.

Just in recent days, two hurricanes brought great destruction with damaging winds and flooding through several southeastern states. Businesses that were thriving one day, on the next day, were destroyed, business owners losing everything. And yes, the same kind of devastating loss was also suffered by each one of their employees.

And it is not just those kinds of sudden events that take place, the business systems that operate our economy here in America seem to have a naturally occurring business cycle, with many ups and downs taking place. And it is often

within those downturns that the corrupt natures of some of those business systems get revealed.

But those kinds of losses are not always the way of things. In the bigger businesses and bigger markets, when a collapse can be anticipated, just as with the shrewd manager in this parable, our modern day corporate managers formulate what they call “parachutes” to give themselves soft landings.

And many times, it actually works out very well for them! Along the way, they have made friends within their “unrighteous mammon” system and as they abandon the sinking ship they are in, another corporation is right at the door, ready to take them in.

We have seen that just in recent days as the corrupt CEO of Disney, Bob Iger, is being tossed aside and musical chairs of big corporations like Morgan Stanley and others take place, providing soft landings for those “shrewd managers.”

“Soft landings” do not however, always work out so well. Some of those managers do not know how to play the game very well. And those managers end up just being fired, or even worse, they go to prison, as did a man that I knew, Bernie Ebbers, the CEO of a telecom company called WorldCom.

And it is not as if those corporate managers started off intending to do evil. Many of them start their career with good intentions. As I believe that Bernie Ebbers did.

In the ministry where I worked, we had opportunity to know Mr. Ebbers somewhat personally. One of his children attended our school, and he and his wife were on our campus often during those years.

Mr. Ebbers started his telephone business with very little money. Some who knew him told of how he went to common ordinary people in his hometown, asking for investments, building up capital and support until one day he was sitting atop a huge corporation.

But again, even when you start out well, you don't always continue well. Sin, the kind warned about in these last words of this parable, has a way of worming its way into a person's behavior and soon, in the rush of business decisions, decent people can and do make poor decisions.

And then suddenly, without much warning, as with the shrewd manager in this parable, accountability will come knocking at the door, and it always surely will. And the once well-intending Bernie Ebbers was found wanting, and in jail. He did not know how to play the “shrewd manager” game very well, and he lost.

And may I add one last thought about Mr. Ebbers. During much of his life, he showed witness of being a solid Christian, regularly teaching Sunday School and bible classes. And in his passing away a few years ago, it is my thought and hope that he made one really good decision for his life, and that for salvation in Christ. And that he is now in heaven.

And folks, this shrewd manager that we are studying about here in this parable may have begun his career as a good and honest man. But as the final words of our parable tell us, money and the desire for it has a way of worming its way into a man’s soul. And when it gets there, it exposes wants and desires and greed that the manager may not have known were there.

And let me also quickly add that this possibility of corruption within a man or a woman’s soul is not exclusive to those who have access to great wealth. To the contrary, the possibilities of the exact same sinful behaviors are present within every one of us, even within the poorest and most impoverished among us.

It is just not as news-worthy when a poor, unknown person like you or me connives, manipulates, cheats and steals from our friends and coworkers.

And that warning is born out in these words of Jesus as He began His parable by addressing it to men of very little means, His own disciples. Listen! This is verse 1,

<sup>1</sup> He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods.(Luke 16:1)

These disciples were not at all wealthy. Some of them were simple fishermen, living on the proceeds from the daily catch.

And please also understand that Jesus was not just giving these men an example about greed so that they might later on craft object lessons and sermons to use in their teaching to others. Yes, it might could be used in that

way, but much more than that, Jesus was telling His disciples that they themselves were subject to the same temptations and the same failures.

And also, again let me say that this parable is not intended as a judgment declaring that all profit making is wrong or sinful. It is not and there is no inherent evil within money itself.

And equally so, there is no inherent evil within most business systems that are employed to earn money. The evil comes in from within each man's or each woman's soul as they use and as they misuse the business systems and the money for personal gain.

As with all sin, it comes up from within the hidden recesses of each person's mind and soul and it slowly works its way out in the behavior that it produces within us. Those words from James chapter 1, that I quote to you often,

<sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

<sup>15</sup> Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)

And again, even the poorest person among us is enticed by evil desires for money and the things that money can buy.

And note also that Jesus used the word "serve", giving the warning that if our desires for the world's mammon is left unchecked, it will not only cause us to stumble into sinful behavior, it will enslave us, and become a literal "master" to us, demanding that we "serve" it with our thoughts and our behaviors. Listen again!

<sup>13</sup> 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 16:13)

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, you and I will often find that our relationship with Him comes in different forms and conditions. Sometimes, as in these words, we are called servants and bond-servants. At other times, we are called friends and co-laborers.

But I want to remind us that the one most important position that we have in our relationship with God is that of being a "son". And yes, thankfully, we who are in

Christ truly are “sons of God”. That truth is given to us in the Book of John chapter 1,

<sup>12</sup> But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. (John 1:12)

And also in Romans chapter 8 we are told,

<sup>14</sup> For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (Romans 8:14)

Folks, we will and we must, always serve our God. But once we have received Christ Jesus as our Savior, we are also His sons, sons of God. And that is why the warning within these last words of this parable are so very, very important.

As sons, we have an undivided ownership in the whole kingdom of God. And yes, everything does belong to God, but it also belongs to us, his sons.

And the money and the property and the things within it are His, but they are also ours. And think about that folks! We have no need to lust after something that is already ours. We have no reason to covet, to connive, and to manipulate and especially to “steal” something that is already ours.

And therein lies the utter perverse foolishness of our lust and our greed. Everything in God’s kingdom is already ours. We have no need to lust after it and try to steal it.

But unfortunately, in our times of weakness, we forfeit some of our position as sons. And we revert to the position of a lowly servant looking for a master to serve. And too often, our old nature raises its head and we find ourselves serving one of the masters of this world, “greed”. And “greed” is a controlling master.

Dear Christian, it is a very, very thin line that our integrity requires us to walk each day, a narrow path, one that fully uses and employs the friendships we are to make with the world’s mammon, but never allowing ourselves to succumb to its lures and never becoming a servant, a slave to it.

Those words again,

<sup>13</sup> 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 16:13)

And oh dear Christian, this truth is not only about the lust for money and other kinds of worldly mammon, this truth is the same for all forms of lustful behaviors that seem to take us captive.

This truth can be seen taking place even within our marriages. If we give in to our emotions we can find ourselves serving the lusts of our flesh towards other women, and turning a once devout love into a despising hatred for our spouse.

And it can go even further than that. As these words reveal to us, once we decide to take a step into disobedience, those same emotions can also actually take place between us and God. I see that kind of thing taking place far too often.

Most would not call what they feel towards God despising or hatred. A person usually just simply stops going to church, stops reading their bible, stops praying, stops serving the Lord and instead serves their own corrupt desires.

The problem with words is that they are not just simple semantics. There is no room in our relationship with God for "in-between" emotions such as "like" or "dislike". It really is either "love" or it is "hate", nothing in between.

So then, disciples, don't ever excuse yourself when you find yourself drifting away from Christ and beginning to love the world and the things of this world. His command to us here is that we are to serve Him and to serve Him only.

And even beyond that, we are to return to our beloved relationship as a son, that place where we own everything already and have no need to covet or to lust after it.

I'll close with these words from 1 John 2,

<sup>15</sup> Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

<sup>16</sup> For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

<sup>17</sup> And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Pray with me.



