**Faithful Stewards of God’s Grace**

**Sermon – Week 3**

**“Good Stewards of God’s Grace”**

**Text: Luke 16:8**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen. This is the third and final message in our stewardship emphasis “Faithful Stewards of God’s Grace.” Today, we will be looking at the Parable of the Unrighteous Steward. I will read just one verse from that Parable. In Luke 16:8, we read, *“The master commended the dishonest manager for the shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.”* Many parables of Jesus like the one today deal with finding and recovering what had been lost. Specifically, they are aimed at lost souls. In today’s parable the focus shifts to dealing with the life and living of those who have been found, to the faithful.

The faith that we have in Jesus as our Savior is reflected by the way we live. Therefore, for the faithful people of God, you and me, the way that we go about conducting the day-to-day business of our lives cannot be separated from our relationship with God. That’s what Jesus is sharing with us in this parable of the unrighteous steward. It’s a fascinating parable for all the would-be philosophers here today. It also touches the lives of every one of us as we struggle to balance in our lives our relationship with God, keeping Him first and foremost, and our wants and desires and dealings with the things of this world, otherwise known as unrighteous mammon, and what it offers us. We are often tempted into thinking that mammon offers the quiet and peaceable life spoken of in 1Timothy 2. Not so.

The parable of the Gospel is a genuine picture of worldliness. Jesus aims it at Pharisees, scribes, publicans and open sinners. All those typical people who in our minds need to hear a lesson on worldliness because from our viewpoint they have this problem of being absorbed in unrighteous mammon. Guess what, my friends, Jesus also and primarily points this parable in the direction of the disciples and so to us.

If you’re sitting there all smug and secure in your pew thinking, “I’m not guilty of worldliness,” think again. No matter what your age, consideration of and involvement with the things of this world is part and parcel of all of us.

I read about three teens who were talking about their future plans. One of them talked of being a doctor because he could have fame and people would come to him and be helped. He saw becoming a doctor as a way to gain popularity and recognition.

The second teen listened and decided he might like to be a doctor too. He described the car his doctor drove, a Farrare, and shared that being a doctor would mean he could have the Lamborghini he admired. He then started into a dissertation listing all the things his parents couldn’t afford that he would have.

The third teen was confused. He thought a few minutes and then shared he desire to do something God wanted him to do, maybe that would mean be a doctor or maybe he would be a nurse.

The other two laughed at him. Why?

In today’s parable we have a rich man whose business is extensive, so much so, that he employed a general manager, a steward, who had full power to handle all his business affairs. We’re not talking about a small business. Eight to nine hundred gallons of olive oil, one thousand bushels of wheat show us the wealth involved. No doubt this steward lived quite a life commensurate with the wealth he dealt in.

As it turns out the steward is a crook. Most of us are aware that’s nothing new in managers who have power like his. In the parable we look in on him at a time in his career when somebody has blown the whistle on him and denounced him to his employer who fires him on the spot. It’s interesting that the steward makes no effort to defend himself and so, admits to his guilt.

The great emphasis of the parable at this point finds itself in the words of our text and the shrewdness of the steward. But before you go too far with your thoughts, please note that this concept of shrewdness is not the main point of Jesus’ parable, although the main point does revolve around shrewdness.

The steward thought about his predicament. He made a decision and then acted very quickly. That shows us some good managerial skills. He figured that he wasn’t strong enough to do hard labor like that of a hired hand, nor was he about to lower himself to have to rely on begging for his existence. His plan is to set things in motion so that his employer’s debtors will take him into their own homes so that he can live at ease until something better comes along. Having squandered his employer’s possessions up to this point, he decides to do it again, one final time.

He pulls the debtor’s note out of the strong box, hands it to him, and tells him to write a receipt for much less than what it really called for. In that day, as in ours, tampered documents would invalidate a transaction, so new obligations are drawn up and substituted for the originals. The deed is done. What a clever man! What a shrewd man!

How many of you are as clever and shrewd as this conscienceless steward? Let’s answer that from a different direction.

How many of you are concerned about your retirement years? More precisely, your ability to exist financially in retirement? We read stories all the time about elderly people and their financial plight. We are exposed to that quite often by the various media most of the time soliciting our aid and assistance. Whether we help or not, one thing is for sure, most people are determined not to let themselves get into that kind of predicament. The result is that we live our lives in the arena of worldliness, unrighteous mammon, trying to accumulate as much as possible toward some mental ideal of what is enough. We call it a “nest egg”. Unfortunately, because we are prone to sin, unrighteous mammon, worldliness, can get hold of us. It takes over our lives with greed and pride and lust so that those become our motivators. At that point we can lose sight of our God and our need for a Savior. Then we are lost.

The shrewd way that rascal of a steward feathered his nest was praised by his employer who was shrewd enough to appreciate it. Now the question arises. What does Jesus have in mind by telling this parable?

Really it applies only to the disciples. Because not until you’re a follower of Jesus can this parable mean to you what Jesus meant it to mean.

I recently read of a pastor who had shared that a good part of his ordination examination consisted of playing pinocle with three officials of his denomination who were doing the evaluation. At the time he related this to his classmates they thought he was putting them on. Yet, some of the older more experienced clergy understood what might have been the rationale for such an examination. Perhaps the examiners thought they could assess the young man’s ability and commitment by how he approached and conducted himself in a game of cards.

Jesus said, *“He who is faithful in very little is faithful in much.”* We often fail to see the witness of Christian faith and conduct that we can communicate in little things; how we deal with our neighbors around the block, how we value our conversations with our children and our parents, how well we do our homework, perhaps even our ethics on the golf course. Our consistency of conduct and our honoring of principles will be seen in the “little things”, and these may even constitute the practice field for the big things in life that God entrusts to us.

The unrighteous steward used unrighteous mammon to make friends for himself to take him in when he was fired. Jesus tells us as disciples to do the same thing, to act with shrewdness in dealing with unrighteous mammon. The difference, however, between the unrighteous steward and us is the motivation. Our use of worldliness is quite the opposite of the unrighteous steward in the end result. His entire focus was rest and ease in this life.

But recall Jesus’ words. “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal habitations.”

Who is it that receives us into the eternal habitations mentioned in our text? It’s God in Christ alone. Therefore, our motivation as people of God isn’t rest and ease in this life. It’s serving almighty God. It’s loving Him because He loved us, enough to die for us. So, we respond in thanksgiving and praise and pass it on.

Amen.