**Luke 16:1-15 (ESV)**

**1** He also 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.” **14**  The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. **15** And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

**“Salvation Does Grow On A Tree”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Greediness is a phenomenon among humanity that goes back to the Garden of Eden. It misuses what God gives for selfish ends just as Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In particular, money or riches always appear to receive attention in the scriptures when it comes to greed. The Ten Commandants came from God at Mt. Sinai, but building the Golden Calf came from the jewelry worn by those delivered out of Egypt. Solomon brought the riches of the world to Israel, but after wisdom faded. A divided kingdom only had greed with God proclaiming, “Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end…” The New Testament also takes note of Jesus tipping over the tables of moneychangers in the temple. Along with the most painful betrayal against Christ was a deal made over thirty pieces of silver.

Make no mistake about it. Greed is the heart of the problem and not money itself. At the same time, Jesus makes it abundantly clear, “You cannot serve God and money.” Martin Luther in the Large Catechism on the 1st Commandment states, “It is the most common idol on earth. He who has money and property feels secure, happy, fearless, as if he were sitting in the midst of paradise. On the other hand, he who has nothing doubts and despairs as if he never heard of God…This desire for wealth clings and cleaves to our nature all the way to the grave” (Tappert 365:9). The fact is we are stewards of whatever God has given us for a short time. Greed certainly gets in the way of this goodness. Yet, Christ teaches in today’s parable how His disciples can handle the least of things because the greater treasures have come by the Gospel. God’s mercy richly given in Jesus Christ leads to wisdom in life with eternal value for sinners.

The Pharisees grumbled last week in chapter 15 over tax collectors and sinners drawing near to hear Jesus. In response, they heard the parables about the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son. All demonstrating God’s desire to seek and save what is lost. Now Jesus turns to tell his disciples about the parable of the dishonest manager. Right from the start of this story, the problem points to the steward. Charges came to the master that he was wasting his possessions. It could have been negligence or fraud, but in the end, the numbers did not add up. When called to an account, the steward had nothing to say for squandering what did not rightfully belong to him. Such unfaithfulness lead to only one solution. It was to hear the master say, “…You can no longer be manager.”

By far, we have more wealth than Adam and Eve ever did. Like in the parable, we receive the charge of being wasteful. Money is a common form of exchange not evil in itself, but in the hands of sinners, money often reveals the common sin we share. In view of the Ten Commandments, greed becomes clear. Coveting has plenty to do with what others buy and I cannot. Slandering a co-worker is to insult the raise they got. Stealing seeks to take what another person earns. Sin affecting married life often deals with money. To hate the wealthy also holds a hidden arrogance that you could do better. Respect for parents does not come by what they buy their kids. Likewise, government is not a business to make me money but a gift of God for upholding good order. Do we gladly hear and learn God’s Word or is it market prices and the power of the dollar? As Proverbs states, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart” (21:2). The improper use of possessions only exposes another master we have against God.

Strangely enough, this master in our parable did nothing with the unjust steward. Some would put such a person in jail or make him work off the debt. The steward was set free. However, it was no freedom for he was better off dead. He said, “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. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.” The man knew money does not grow on trees. He turned to the mercy of his master once again to slash the debt others owed. It was unjust and unfair to the master, but that is what the steward banked on, his mercy. It paid off for him. Jesus said, “The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.” It does not mean he was good, but the man was wise on how to get out of his situation. This is like how a business may support charities more than for good, but because it actually does increase profits.

Plenty take advantage on how to use the daily bread God graciously gives to us, even to all evil people. Yet, His mercy is far more than what comes about in this creation. Christ is the mercy of God who shows our salvation does grow on a tree! The law brings the reality of our debt. The amount of sin is what none could pay. What we deserve is “present and eternal punishment.” Yet, the truth is mercy abounds for you and all people. He lets us go free. You have nothing to work off or owe. Of course, this mercy was not free for God. St. Paul proclaimed, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” The accounting of our wastefulness was not paid in dollar signs, but with the holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death of God’s Son. What it cost Jesus by His sacrifice erased all debt by the cross. This mercy shown was a one-time event for a sinful world, but any indebted sinner can count on such mercy still today. God keeps giving us His Word and Sacrament with freedom in forgiveness.

Rather than only managing things for this life making money the ultimate god. Jesus tells His disciples they are freed to have faith in His mercy as Savior. He says, “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.” Jesus takes down the false god we so foolishly worship saying, “When it fails?” It is not if, but when money will fail. True security is to trust in the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. He tells us, “While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (John 12:36). The unjust steward rendered a service only benefiting him for this life, but the baptized serve others with an eternal perspective built on Christ. It has lasting value because this generosity reflects what God has already given for us in the Gospel. Fruits flowing out of the cross are a true and living faith with mercy toward the debt of other sinners.

Wisdom now means using even money to declare the greater treasure given to us in Jesus. This exceeds being a good humanitarian, helping the poor, or being an upright citizen. All this still puts a person in hell for without Christ it has no eternal value. Money should support sad situations, but only the saving Word changes sinful hearts. Money should buy medicine for the sick, but only baptism lets a person die in Christ. Money should shame the devil by doing good, but only Christ is present in the Lord’s Supper to give His true body and blood. As Jesus said, “If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?” The Word and Sacrament surpass the power of money so mercy in meager things like money is to prove salvation does grow on a tree. God’s mercy richly given in Jesus Christ leads to wisdom in life with eternal value for sinners. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.