

Faithfully Shrewd

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In a game show a **clock is ticking**, but the **graduations** on the clock are not minutes but dollars. The contestant must **answer the questions** within the time allotted or he or she will have no money left. Slowly the amount of money left on the contestant's position screen is creeping to zero and **when the money is gone**, he or she can **no longer participate**. He has a **limit time before the money is utterly gone**. In a way, that game show is **like life**.

Eventually our **time will be up** in our **administration** of our worldly goods. When that time arrives, **we cannot possess** them any longer. But this is **not a game show**. This is life. When the clock **strikes zero**, we are done. The clock striking zero may be a **catastrophe** in our life or **our death**.

All we accumulated for self is futile – our possessions will someday be gone and once they are gone, that is it, we cannot get them back. Jesus says what we **need to be doing** with our worldly goods, while we have them, is use them to **make a difference for the kingdom of God**. The kingdom of God is the only thing that **lasts**. For making **investments for kingdom** of God will draw benefits for eternal life. **What are those investments?**

Exegetical Look at the Passage

- (1) Jesus is now speaking to his disciples again, which means his speech is **directed to the Christian reader** of the passage (i.e.: to you).
- (2) In order to **properly understand** what is going on in this **parable** we have to **layout the characters** in the scene. The rich man is probably an

absentee landlord, owner of a large amount of estate, who entrusts the day-to-day and week-by-week business of **handling the estate to a front man**, or an **estate manager**. This is not just a head-servant. This manager is entrusted to make all **financial decisions** and **all documents** are signed in the manager's name. He would **lend his master's property** out to others and he would **gain a commission** from the sale. He would **take some of the interest** as commission and the rest of the interest would be the lord's profit. Similar to tax collectors of Jesus day.

(3) This particular manager has been **accused of mismanagement**, either because of theft or mismanagement of the funds given to him. He does not try to **defend himself** before his Lord.

(4) He is in a **quandary** and has a similar discussion with self the prodigal son has with himself. In fact, the parable of the shrewd manager and the prodigal son have many similarities and will help us interpret this parable. He is about to **lose his job**. And has no other means to **support himself and his family**. He needs to find himself **another patron or boss**. He needs to **get in good** with the rich people he knows – his present **Lord's customers and debtors**.

(5) The lord of the estate **praises the manager** for his **shrewdness**, so evidently the manager is **not doing anything wrong** other than maybe misrepresent the situation that he is still the lord's estate manager.

(6) Don't forget **usury** was illegal according to the law of the Hebrew Bible, so what they did is denominate the note with the interest already in the note. The interest he **is hacking off** was the commission of the estate manager. In order to **ingratiate himself** with the wealthy debtors, he

eliminated the interest that was due the manager. He **was not short-changing** his lord what was owe the Lord. The **manager signed the document**, so he could make such changes without the signature of the lord. And he knew the lord would not **over-ride the transaction**, for that would produce shame in a shame culture for the lord. "Oh, you mean you are not being generous to me? It was just your manager who was trying to be generous?"

(7) Jesus makes this example that God's people too must use some **shrewdness** in their use of **material possessions**. Like the manager whose time was up as manager, so eventually **all Christian's time will be up** in their administration of their worldly goods. What Jesus says is that God's people need to be doing with their limited time with their worldly goods is use them to **make a difference for the kingdom of God**. The kingdom of God is the only thing that lasts. For making investments for kingdom of God will **draw benefits for eternal life**.

(8) Jesus brings out to his disciples that **God is watching** how people handle the little amount of resources he has given them in this life. **The principle** that God goes by is that if one is a poor handler of money with a little, one will not be any different with handling a large amount.

(9) Jesus ends the passage with asking where are the **disciples' loyalties**. They have a choice. It is not both. It is one or the other: Do they serve **earthly possessions or God**.

Points of the Passage to Remember

We have only a **limited time** with the material **possessions** given us – before they fail utterly.

- Everything **rusts** and corrodes away
- **Thieves**, governments and banking financiers steal
- It gets **spent pretty quickly**
- We finally die and **cannot take it with us**

The **opposite of a shrewd person is a stupid person – a fool.**

Jesus advises us to use our possessions **to make friends who receive us into eternal abode.**

- We are not talking that we can **gain our eternal reward** by our use of our possessions.
- What Jesus is talking about **asking ourselves how can we make a difference for his kingdom by how we use our funds**
 - Being **generous** with friends and relatives
 - Giving our **fair share at church**, according to our means
 - Giving **to charities**, Lutheran **missions**
 - Giving **blood this week** would be a good start.
 - Giving to **those in need.**

God is watching how you handle the little amount he has given you in this life. The principle that God goes by is that if you are a poor handler of money with a little, one will not be any different with handling a large amount. So if you are not generous with your money, God will not bless you with large amounts in this life.

Jesus ends the passage with asking “**Where is our love?**” Do we really love God and love others? Well do we show it in **our generosity** to church, to charity and people? Or do we show God our love for money by

our tightness and stinginess? There is no middle ground here. We either love God or love our possessions.

Application to the Congregation

Sin does **not always come from evil**, but rather is a result of choice – a choice of **lesser good over a greater good**, our choice of going after the **gifts**, instead of going after the **giver of the gifts**. **Possessions – our having them, or using them for our good is not evil**, but we must keep in mind that material possessions are a **lesser good**. The greater good is using those possessions for the Giver's purposes – to make a difference in our life for the kingdom of God. These material possessions become evil when they take the place of the greater good; we prioritize them over the greater good.

We need to have an indifference to material goods. Hold them at **arm's length** for two reasons: (1) so that our heart does not **get attached** to them and (2) so that we can **give them away easier**.

What would be our attitude if our investment counselor called us up and said all your retirement funds are gone? Of course, some anger, but not the end of your world.

Concluding Thought

Our epistle reading is about God being Faithful. Because God is so faithful, we too must show faithfulness in all God gives us.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Midweek, the ninth week after Trinity

Luke 16:1-15; 1 Corinthians 10:6-13; 2 Samuel 22:26-34

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