

Friends For Eternity:  
A Financial Gameplan From God

A Sermon on Luke 16:1-13  
Year C - Pentecost 18  
18 - September - 2016

JJ<sup>1</sup>

Robin Hood and his Merry Men. It's a story that's been told for centuries. Why? Well, everyone loves that story. But what about the Enron executives, or those from Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac? Don't you like those guys? Well, why not? Those guys were thieves just like Robin Hood and his Merry Men! Why is it that we praise one and despise the other? Both sorts are cunning and clever thieves. Ah yes! One steals from the rich, and the other the not-so-rich. But apply both situations to God's holy law, they're all guilty. Neither are examples for us in Christian living. Which is why today's text is so shocking at first glance. The main character in Jesus' parable doesn't seem to be much different than the thieving vigilante Robin Hood or the conniving executives.

As we read through the Gospel today you might have wondered, "What in the world is Jesus doing using an absolute scoundrel as an example for us?" Although Jesus makes his point perfectly plain after he teaches the parable, we so often get bogged down in the details of the parable that we miss the main point.

One thing we have to keep in mind with parables is that Jesus uses them to make one specific point which he always ex-

plains. The other details aren't to be pressed to find some deeper or hidden meaning and often are only there to set the stage for the main point. It's no different with today's parable.

There was a rich man who had a manager taking care of all the affairs of his estate. This manager was dishonest and wasteful. The master discovers the manager's crooked ways and summons him, "What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer."

The manager, already a professional in crooked dealing, decides that while he has one last chance to cheat his master, he'll use it to serve himself the rest of his life. To finish his final preparation of the financial reports he plots to cook the books one last time. He quickly calls in his master's debtors one by one and has them change all their bills to earn favors from them in the future for saving them so much money. Some calculate the savings for each debtor as 18 months' income!

Then something strange happens. Even though this scoundrel fleeces him again, the master commends him for being so shrewd! Being a clever businessman him-

---

<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

self, the master respects the manager for being such a cut-throat business man.

Now we're still left wondering, "Good grief! I thought God wants us to think only of others and not ourselves?" You're right. Now listen to Jesus' purpose in telling this parable. "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light."

The master didn't commend his manager for cheating him, he only commended him for his shrewdness. From this parable Jesus gives us a **financial gameplan** for life. What is that gameplan? Jesus says, "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

A quick side-note that we'll talk about more in a minute. The NIV drops the ball on the translation of the end of that verse. The NIV has "you will be welcomed" but the Greek says, "they will welcome you." Keep that in mind.

Today Jesus shows us why he gives us earthly riches. Today Jesus gives us a **financial gameplan**, and that gameplan is simply to use our earthly blessings and wealth to gain **FRIENDS FOR ETERNITY**.

God's financial gameplan involves us being shrewd (wise) with our money and faithful. And it all starts with the last verse of our text today. "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot love both God and Money."

This is one of the biggest problems you and I have. Money and stuff. We love it. We want more of it or the better version of what we do have. We put our names on it, whether physically, or in our hearts.

Since the day we first clutched something and screamed, "MINE!" we have displayed our selfishness and greed.

You and I have two strikes against us when it comes to this temptation. Not only are we born with a greedy, sinful heart, but we also live in a land and culture that

daily tries to convince us that not only do we deserve these things, but that we can also find real joy and happiness in them.

You and I constantly need the reminder that every possession and penny we have isn't ours. It is all God's. Everything we are and have has been given to us by God. No, he doesn't miraculously materialize these blessings before our very eyes (even though he could). God chooses to give much of what we have through the various physical and mental abilities he created in us. God gives skills. He blesses those skills as we put them to



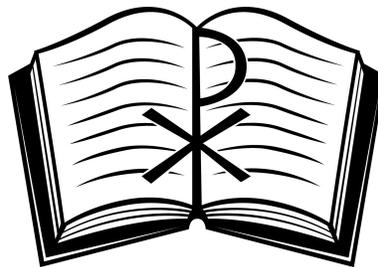
work, and he cares for us through them. God is indeed our generous and merciful master!

Like the man in the parable only stayed out of prison because his master was so generous and merciful, so too God. The only reason we have been spared the eternal debtor's prison of hell is because God is so generous and merciful. Even though we have cheated God by selfishly keeping his gifts for ourselves, he did the most outrageous business deal the world had ever seen. We cheat, we lie, we connive, we covet, we serve Money instead of him, and yet he chose to pay our debt! And he didn't just ignore our debt, he actually paid it off!

God didn't just take our bill and wipe a few thousands years off our eternity in hell. Jesus paid off the debt in full. For every person who will ever live, the infinite, eternal debt of hell has been paid. And not only that, in his wisdom and love, God has come to you individually and wiped that debt from your heart through Holy Baptism. And he did that in part by putting his **financial gameplan** into effect.

You see, you and I wouldn't be here today in this house of worship had not God given his **financial gameplan to win friends for eternity** to those who came before us. For generations, God's people have used his financial gameplan and been wise and faithful with their earthly

wealth, often giving even beyond their means. Over 150 years ago, God led his people in Europe to raise the funds and ministers to send them as missionaries to the New World. Your ancestors came to this place, and through **God's financial gamelan** they gave of their time, money and skills to provide a house of worship, minister and support for our church body to provide future ministers. Your mission dollars helped provide a pastor for today. Your mission dollars today help provide a pastor for the future. And not only that, it helps provide for other congregations throughout the world.



Friends, when you give your offerings, you are transforming your time and work into ministry. And when that happens, you are using your worldly wealth to gain spiritual and eternal treasures. You are gaining **FRIENDS**

#### **FOR ETERNITY!**

Do you remember what I told you to keep in mind a couple minutes ago? As we follow **God's financial gameplan** making **FRIENDS FOR ETERNITY** God doesn't say that we earn our dwelling in heaven. He tells us that when we get home to heaven one of the things that will happen is that we will be welcomed by those friends we gained by being wise and faithful with our worldly wealth, giving to God first. And you know what? Most of those people you will be meeting for the first time! You will be meeting people not just from our community and

have sat in our pews, but you will be meeting people from around the world, and people who will live centuries after you have gone home to heaven!

Friends, we can be clever and wise to save for retirement and to leave something for our children, but also remember that those are not things we can take with us and neither can they. It's good to be clever and wise to plan for those later years of life. It *can* be an act of love to give a gift to our children in death. But just think how much ministry we could accomplish if we were so wise and clever in giving our gifts to the Lord! Consider how you can invest to provide for the ministry here and throughout our church body. Consider how you can leave a portion, if not all of your estate to the church where God will use that money to continue to gain **FRIENDS FOR ETERNITY**.

Friends, there is no better thing we can do with the worldly wealth God has given us than to gain **FRIENDS FOR ETERNITY**. It's the #1 reason God has given us our gifts. It's to help bring God's Kingdom to others. That's what it means to give God our firstfruits. To give back to the Lord first, both freely and cheerfully, comes only with blessings. It's not to our loss, but to the gain of many others. Amen.

SDG<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.