

Single-Minded Stewards

† See the reality (vv.1-9)

† Serve one Master (vv.10-13)

In the name of Jesus, our loving Lord and Master, dear fellow stewards of God's gifts and graces:

It makes you feel good, doesn't it, to realize God sees you in the chapter right before our text? Three *Lost and Found Parables* of Jesus are about you. You are the lost sheep He carried back on His shoulders. You are the coin the poor woman rejoiced to find. You are the son who came back in shame, only to find your father waiting with open arms. Pure love holds us close to God for Jesus' sake. All it takes to appreciate this is a humble heart confessing your sin and receiving God's forgiveness in Christ.

But that takes a miracle called repentance, the miraculous change of mind about sin, self and Savior. Jesus gives us true repentance. But that alone will not make us good managers of all God gives us day by day. We could easily head home feeling good and then forget why God gives us so much. God's love does not stop with you and me. His love is infinite like His power and intelligence. God's love does not diminish but only grows as He wraps His grace around more and more hearts and lives. Love is why God wants to make us **Single-Minded Stewards**. Love is why He wants us to...

† See the reality (vv.1-9)

With so many people losing their jobs these days, it's not hard to imagine yourself in the position of this manager in Jesus' parable. Hopefully in your case the accusations would be false. Apparently, not for him. Did you notice? He never objects to the charges of wasting his master's possessions. It must have been true. The Holy Spirit's original word for *wasting* literally means *scattering*. Rather than focusing his efforts for his master, this manager frittered away his time and talents in many other directions. In Fort Mackinac museum on Mackinac Island, a military inscription says soldiers' time and talents all belong to the government. Orders are to focus there and not in bars and brothels.

This wasteful steward was not going to find himself in the damp, dark hold of a fort prison. He knew he was going to be out of a job right after his meeting with the boss. What to do...what to do...what to do...? What he did not do was ring his hands and cry. He took a reality check on his resources. "Ditch digging? I'm too weak. Begging? I don't want the shame. Safety net? That I can do." So he called some meetings of his own. Since he still had control of his master's finances, reducing the debts of a few deep debtors could make friends to catch him when he fell. While he still had time, he did what he could with what he had. And his master actually praised him for being "*shrewd*."

Motivational speakers are loaded with inspiring stories about people squeezing a life of lemons to make lemonade. One of my favorites is about Jay Leno back when he was living in Boston. Before he was a famous comedian, he needed a job. So he applied at a Mercedes dealership. How did he feel when the boss said, "We're not hiring"? I don't know. Doesn't matter. He went back the following Monday to the place where they wash the cars. "I'm the new guy," he told the service manager. "What do I do?" A few days later the owner walked in. "What's he doing here?" "Oh, he's the new guy. He's really a hard worker." Jay Leno got the job like my older brother on a golf course when we were teenagers. He came home depressed the first day because the boss said he was too small to lay sod. But Mom said, "That's today. You go back tomorrow." Biking seven miles over and seven miles back kept up three more days until the sod boss said, "Weren't you here yesterday?" "Yes, and the day before," my brother answered. "You must really want to work." "You bet I do!" That job led to night waterman and finally designing water systems for new golf courses. That boss became a major landscaper who later hired our two younger brothers. Many jobs traced back to one stubborn kid who wouldn't take "No!" for an answer.

Ah, yes! Inspiring stories. But there's one nagging question. Is Jesus telling us to be dishonest? Is that what "*shrewd*" means? Remember, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. In real life, we don't get to make the rules. We have to play the game the way others make them. Jesus put it this way, "*I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.*" (Matthew 10:16 NIV) There's another clue at the heavenly meaning.

Honesty does not mean stupidity. Wisdom focuses our nearsighted souls beyond this life to something greater and higher, far beyond ourselves. Surely God loves you enough to give you food and clothing and shelter and gifts and talents beyond what you even realize you have. But why? Just for you? God's love reaches far. Jesus wants us to learn a lesson from the dishonest manager in the way he used what he had to do what he could. "*The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.*" That was another lesson from Mackinac Island. Those beautiful homes of liquor and lumber barons, railroad tycoons and famous meat packers are still standing. But the men who built them are long gone, often with the family fortune, always in death. **See the reality?** What can we do with what we have here to help us then and there?

✠ **Serve one Master (vv.10-13)**

It's not just an American thing. This human heart always wants me to be my own master, to choose my own way. Whether there's a revolution or just lazy workers dragging their feet, "Me, Myself and I" are the unholy trinity of this sinful heart. That master Myself despises the little things.

Our waiter one evening was so gloomy especially after we failed to order drinks, just water. But he was friendly as could be to the table of four behind us. Their tab would double the food and more for their libations. They were funny and personable and thoughtful for their waiter too, enough that he told them a little of his life story. Long and short, he was going nowhere and he knew it. Among other things, this was missing. He lacked a Christian parent to teach this little lesson from God. Wages and tips will never satisfy. But serving the least of people who can give you nothing in return? That kind of faithfulness is a gift of God in Christ. Truly "*it is more blessed to give than to receive.*" (Acts 20:35)

God lives this giving for us. Think of how little and insignificant that Baby looked lying there in a manger. Sheep and cattle all around, His young mother and stepfather too poor to wrap Him in anything but swaddling clothes. No room for them in the inn. That night only shepherds came to see. And what did those shepherds have to offer any of the passersby on their way back to their flocks? As little as that poor fisherman named Peter many years later in the temple. What Mary and Joseph and the shepherds had, Peter could also give. He said to the crippled beggar, "*Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.*" (Acts 3:6 NIV)

If you cannot be trusted with little things like money, how will God be able to entrust you with true riches like God's powerful Word and sacraments? If you are faithful with money – giving to God your firstfruit thank offerings, paying your taxes, caring for your family and for the poor, even enjoying some recreation now and then – all these little moments of honesty speak volumes when done by a heart that believes in God as the Giver of every good gift. And when you know that the greatest Gift is Christ, when you own His righteousness and holiness by faith, when the guilt is gone because your sins are all forgiven, then you will eagerly **Serve One Master**, and it won't be money. Money cannot even guard itself. But God will guard and keep our souls as **Single-Minded Stewards** focused on heaven. That's why God gives us gifts and talents, to spread God's Word.

Whether you're cleaning toilets or mowing lawns, show your love for God by how you make them sparkle and shine. Then when people ask you why, be ready to say, "God sent His Son to take my sins away." That soul may be the first up there to welcome you home along with the loving arms of our Father in heaven. As the quarterback said to his tight end, "Go long. Go long." Let's go for God – short, long and everything in between – for Jesus' sake. Amen.