

September 18 2016

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 113

Amos 8:4-7

I Timothy 2:1-7

Sermon *The Shrewd Manager*

Frank had a great job. He was the manager for a very successful and busy commodities firm. His boss had other businesses so he quite often was not on site, trusting Frank to take care of his business the way he would want his business handled. Things had been considerably busy the last few months and Frank was having a hard time handling everything that he had to do to the point where he was losing money and business for his boss. His boss got wind of this and made a visit to the firm and called Frank into his office. He told him that he had heard about the poor way Frank was handling things and that he was to be let go. Instead of saying, however, that he was to pack up the things in his desk and leave immediately, Frank had 2 weeks to get things in order. As Frank went back to his desk, his mind was going 100 miles an hour. What was he going to do? He was at the age where he was close to retirement and it would be hard for him to find a job equal to this one. He didn't want to end up being a Walmart greeter or having to flip burgers at McDonalds. There had to be a way that he could find another job like this one. He decided that he would contact some of his boss's customers and make a deal with them. If he reduced the amount that they owed his boss, maybe they would be able to help him find a job to his liking. With time being of the essence, he began contacting the customers that would benefit the most from this plan and would be the most likely to help him out. When he found out what Frank had done, his boss had to admit that Frank was very shrewd in working out a way to keep the lifestyle that he was accustomed to when he left the business.

So keep the story of Frank in your mind as I read the scripture lesson from Luke 16, verses 1 through 13.

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.' Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position 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 dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.'

He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?'

He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.'

He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.'

And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

Now, I have to admit that this parable was a challenge to interpret. First of all the manager acted shrewdly and quickly to find a way to prevent himself from doing manual labor or having to resort to begging. His boss commended him for his shrewdness. Now you would think that the boss would be upset with how the manager pulled this off. He basically reduced the amount of his customer's debt so the boss would end up with less. I don't think the boss was pleased with what the manager did but he was impressed with his skill and strategy. So was the manager a bad person or not? Yes and no. He wasn't handling the business as he should and then when it came to losing his job, he basically lost business and money for his boss for his own gain. But he was smart in that he seized an opportunity and acted on it.

So what was Jesus trying to tell the disciples and what are we to learn from this parable. First I think that even though the manager was not the most honest person, he thought quickly on his feet. In any world if you can't think quickly and be shrewd, it is hard to move ahead. It is just how you think quickly that matters. Verses 10-13 also help us to understand what Jesus was saying. Faithfulness and honesty are not related to wealth and power. One who is faithful over a little will be faithful over a large amount. If you are dishonest with a little you will be dishonest with a lot. If you can't take care of what belongs to another, how can we earn what we can call our own? If we can't take care of what God has provided for us while we are here on earth, why should we be allowed to go to heaven? We can't serve two masters, we must choose between acquiring wealth and serving God. If we have wealth, we need to be shrewd in how it is handled. If we worship

God rather than our own wealth, we will find we have our place in heaven. In the Interpreter's Bible for Luke, there is a commentary from Fred Craddock saying the chief duty of the steward or manager is to be faithful even in small things. It reads as follows:

Most of us will not this week christen a ship, write a book, end a war, appoint a cabinet, dine with a queen, convert a nation, or be burned at the stake. More likely the week will present no more than a chance to give a cup of water, write a note, visit a nursing home, vote for a county commissioner, teach a Sunday school class, share a meal, tell a child a story, go to choir practice and feed the neighbor's cat. "Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much."

Bottom line is that God has to be first in our lives no matter what. Then we need to be stewards of all that is here for us on earth, being mindful of what is happening around us and to be ready to do what needs to be done.

Remember, we as Christians are God's managers; we need to run His business wisely and responsibly. Amen.