

## ***“The Master and His Kingdom”***

Did you hear what Jesus said in the Gospel reading for today about this master and his dishonest manager? He’s speaking to His disciples – He’s speaking to you. You listen to what Jesus has to say, like His disciples (as well as the Pharisees who are listening in) – and you conclude that this is all wrong!

Are you hearing what YOU are saying? Man telling God that He is wrong – ridiculing Him, just like the Pharisees?

Remember, the parables are a revelation by God, showing us how things are in His kingdom – how He rules in the kingdom of God. The parable before us today comes on the heels of the three “lost” parables in St. Luke 15 – the Parable of the Lost Sheep – the Parable of the Lost Coin – and the Parable of the Prodigal son.

The parable of the prodigal son leads us into this parable of the dishonest manager. You might remember that, in the parable of the prodigal son, the son took the inheritance of his father and wasted it all in wild living, and ends up destitute. When he finally came to his senses – he realized how much better it would be for him to be a slave in his father’s house.

In that parable there are two surprising things that reveal how the Lord rules in His kingdom. First of all, the son comes confessing his sin and his unworthiness and begging to be a slave – but the father will have none of that – he totally forgives this sinful, unworthy son and lavishes him with the riches of his household.

The second thing has to do with the older son who is absolutely livid that the father would forgive the younger son like that – and points out how unfair it is that he (the faithful son) has not been lavished with his father’s riches. To which the father invites him to rejoice that his lost brother has been found, and to enjoy the feast that he has prepared – because, after all, these riches have always been yours (the father says).

All of this is to teach us who our Father in heaven is – and how He rules His household. It is not by merit and worthiness – but by grace – rejoicing with all who are gathered to His feast.

Here in the parable of the dishonest manager – we are also being taught who the Lord, our Master is – and how He rules in His kingdom. We so easily get caught up in the managers abuse of the master’s possession, using them for himself – and we are taken aback when the master commends the manager for what he has done.

But notice what Jesus actually says. “The master commended the dishonest manager” – not for his dishonesty – but “FOR HIS SHREWDNESS.” The master commends him for assessing the situation and using the resources at hand.

Obviously, Jesus is not telling us to cheat and steal from our master – to be dishonest and unfaithful – because He clearly tells us elsewhere that this is not how it is to be in His kingdom. The point here is SHREWDNESS. That is what He commends.

As with the parable of the prodigal son, we learn something about our Master and His kingdom. Jesus says that you cannot serve two masters – for you will either hate the one and love the other – or be devoted to one and despise the other.

Because the Pharisees are listening in, and they are “lovers of money” (and we are very much like those Pharisees) – Jesus sets before us the example of two masters, God and money. Which master will you be devoted to, and what kind of a master is he?

On the one hand, try serving and being devoted to money and you’ll have a master who expects balanced books – perfect faithfulness – and that all of his resources will be used for his benefit. That’s how money rules his kingdom.

On the other hand, the one true Master – the Lord your God – is one who commends the man who properly assesses the situation and who uses the resources at hand.

So, like the manager in the parable, you assess your situation – and like him you confess that you have not been faithful in the use of your master’s possessions – and, you confess that you are not strong enough to dig and are ashamed to beg – that is, you confess your unfaithfulness, and your unworthiness, before God.

Like the father who receives back the prodigal son, so the Lord your Master also desires what is good for you. Or, to say it another way – He rules in His kingdom for YOUR benefit.

Yes, He desires faithfulness in the use of His possessions – His gifts entrusted into your hands – and yet, He is gracious and merciful, forgiving your dishonesty and releasing you from indebtedness to Him. In His kingdom, His desire is that you would be free – free from sin and its bondage and guilt and shame and death – free to rejoice and use all the possessions He has entrusted to you.

In your day to day life, the Lord entrusts you with many things – a faithful spouse, children, parents, employment – all sorts of things that fall under “daily bread” – and His desire is that you would realize these gifts from His hands – and receive them with thankfulness and use them as He intends – for your benefit and for the benefit of your neighbor.

How much more then are the “true riches” of His kingdom – His means of grace, His Word and Sacraments, by which He rules over you – giving that which is not deserved – but that which is good, and a blessing to you.

And so, in shrewdness, you assess the situation (that of sinner and Savior) – and you make use of the resources at hand (Jesus the Savior of sinners, and His Word and Sacraments). For in these gifts, the Lord Himself sets you free – free to rejoice with Him at the feast in His kingdom – free to live under His gracious rule, now and for all eternity. Amen.

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