

Luke 16:1-15 “I Love Your Kingdom Lord”

September 18, 2016

It happened again this week. I picked the same opening hymn for worship this morning and this afternoon without realizing it. Somehow the organists always notice those things. So, I had to find a new opening hymn for this morning. The one I was led to was “I Love your Kingdom, Lord”. Ask yourself, why is God’s kingdom so attractive? Why would Moses give up the treasures of Egypt for the sake of God’s kingdom? Why would Martin Luther risk arrest and even death for the sake of Gospel?

That is the question we want to pursue today. If you were given the choice of where to live, where would you want to live? A friend’s daughter got a scholarship to the University of Hawaii. That’s sounds great but where do you go for spring break? When we lived in Saskatchewan, all the farmers dreamed of the day when they could retire and move to town. When we moved here, all the bankers and executives were dreaming of the day they could retire and move to the country. Some people dream of the east coast, some long for the west. Some want to live close to family, others not so much.

The question before us today is this one: where do you want to live spiritually? Would you prefer the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of this world? Do you want to live close to God or far away from God? Maybe you are searching for something in between so you can live your own life without looking over your shoulder all the time. Is the kingdom of God really the best place to be? A Facebook picture carried the following caption, “Do you remember your mother saying things like “You’re going to bed right after supper” or “You’re not leaving this house” or “No, you can’t go to that party”? There was a time when those were punishments. Now they have become your dreams.

Today’s parable puts us in the middle of a peculiar situation. A rich man has a manager who has been wasting his possessions so he calls him to account. Knowing that the hammer is about to fall, he calls in all his master’s debtors and one after another starts forgiving their debts. He knew that hard times were coming and he wanted some friends he could rely on when things got tough. When the rich man discovered what was happening, he commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness in the face of the day of reckoning. Now, if you look at the context of this parable, it comes right after Luke 15 and the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son. Those three parables are set to reveal the heart of God.

The lost son is often called the prodigal son. The core meaning of that word “prodigal” is “recklessly extravagant”, wasteful, thoughtless, uncaring. This son takes a third of his father’s money and goes to Las Vegas where he spends it all on his drinking buddies, gambling, and show girls. That’s reckless extravagance all right. But there is someone in the parable who is even more reckless than that wasteful son. It’s the father. Having lost a third of his estate, he now throws open the bank vault to welcome his son home again. Chapter 15 ends with the elder brother twisted with anger at the idea that his father would forgive such a debt and let him back in the house. That elder brother is a full reflection of the Pharisees. They are the ones twisted with anger that Jesus would be so recklessly extravagant as to sit down and eat with the scum of the earth.

So Jesus has another parable to tell. This time it is not from the side of reckless grace, but from the side of justice satisfied. That’s the key. Our parable of the Shrewd Manager directly follows the parable of the Prodigal Son. At the end, we hear the Pharisees’ reaction: “The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.” That’s important because when you study a parable, you have to ask a question. Who is the parable aimed at? This one is aimed squarely at the Pharisees. But not just them, it is aimed at everyone else who prefers the kingdom of justice to the kingdom of grace.

I love your kingdom, Lord. Why? Because of God himself who is extravagant to the extreme. He does not wish any to perish, but all to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4) In Romans 2:4, St. Paul writes, “God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance.” In his explanation of the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Luther says, “God gives daily bread, even without our prayer, to all wicked men.”

In his unrelenting desire to save the perishing, you might argue that God wastes His blessings on those who don't deserve them. To that we have to say, "This is most certainly true!" God is always wasting His blessings on those who don't deserve them. When you read this parable in Luke 16, it is easy to get side tracked. Most study Bibles and commentaries dance around what it means, but really miss the target. There are two essentials to see in this text.

1 The shrewd manager is commended because he understands that relationships are always more important than money. If, as Jesus says, you can't serve two masters, then you and I have to make a choice. Choose wisely and you will live. Choose poorly and you will die. Will it be God or money? - Will it be relationships or money?

2 That leads to the second essential. Will it be mercy or justice?

Did you ever stop to consider that the shrewd manager is a picture of Jesus himself? For the sake of cementing an eternal relationship with us, He willingly plotted to take our debts upon himself and suffer the wrath of the rich man in order to set us free? He willingly and knowingly suffered the consequences of our debt in our place. He was willing to put himself under the full weight of the justice of God, just so He wouldn't have to be alone in heaven forever. That goes for us too. In thankfulness for forgiving our debt for us, we take Him in and we get saved!

What lesson did Ebenezer Scrooge learn that Christmas Eve so long ago? Mr. Scrooge was the richest man in London. He was also the most hated man in London. If his heart wasn't changed, what would be his future? Who or what was his God? What had changed by the next morning? How did he see people before his conversion? How did he see them after? By Christmas morning, Scrooge had had a conversion experience. Money was no longer his god. What mattered most to him were relationships, the people he loved. By Christmas morning, he had learned the secret of being content. He was not only willing, but eager to pour out and squander his wealth for the sake of those he loved.

The reckless extravagance of God that the Pharisees witnessed in the actions and parables of Jesus had gone just too far. Multitudes were coming to Jesus, tax collectors and sinners. Jesus loved the scum of the earth. He welcomed sinners and ate with them. He had to be stopped! How can God just forgive them? What happened to justice? The truth is that the justice of God was not ignored but it was re-directed. The debt was not erased but it was transferred. With justice satisfied, God could look upon sinners with eyes of grace. Do you know why He did it? Was He worried about what it would cost to save them? Or did His redeeming love for sinners and debtors outweigh everything else? When it came to saving sinners, no cost was too great.

So what should our attitude be toward money, and life, and relationships? What should our attitude be toward other people? How should we live? Choose wisely and you will live. Choose poorly and you will die. How should we as individuals and as a church, make use of our worldly riches? We have already been redeemed and set free from our debt. Jesus was willing to sacrifice himself. Now He says do what the world does. Spend your worldly riches on what matters the most. Where your heart is, your treasure will follow. Just make sure that your heart is in the right place.

This text is not just about money. It is about debts erased at great personal cost. It is about one very wise individual who was willing to face judgment for the sake of his friends who were hopelessly in debt. It is also about zeal for the kingdom of God. About what is most important to you. About what you are willing to bear for the sake of those in debt, for the sake of lost souls. When we do a Bible Study from the Old Testament, I try to remind people to ask two questions: "Where are you in this story?" and "Where is Jesus in this story?"

Where is Jesus when Adam and Eve sinned and were about to come under God's judgement? Instead of fig leaves, Adam and Eve end up dressed in animal skins. They were now dressed in the sinless sin of someone who had died to cover them. So, where is Jesus in this parable? He is the servant who must give an account before the judge of all. He is the servant who wants to make friends with the debtors. He is the servant who will run interference on our behalf of debtors and take their burden and the punishment on himself. He will put himself at risk for their

sake. He will put himself in the gap for the sake of debtors. Where are you? You and I are the debtors whom Jesus invites to bring to him the ledger accounts of all that we owe. Your debt is about to become history.

Picture Jesus coming to each sinner and saying, “what is your sin?” Here, erase it. Give it to me and I will take care of it. Scripture says that Jesus is the mediator between us and God. If you think about it, this text is a fulfillment of Isaiah 1:18: *“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”*

Here God looks at the sin of His people and decides that instead of exacting the punishment of their debt of sin, He decides to strike a deal.

It fulfills the mission of the Messiah in Isaiah 53: *“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... all we like sheep have gone astray and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity ... the debt ... of us all.”*

Jesus, your Saviour is willing to suffer the consequences of erasing your debt. And what does the Father do? The Father commends Him for the way in which justice is satisfied and grace prevails. What will happen in heaven? All of those who have been rescued from debts they couldn’t pay will welcome Him and praise Him forever.

There is one more thing in our text today that you need to see. What is our calling? Our calling is to pass along that same grace that we have been given so that others might become spiritually debt free. Jesus gave great power to the church when He said to the disciples, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” Then He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

As His servants, we have been given the authority to erase sins. And on the last day when you stand together in heaven with those whom you have forgiven, what will happen then? They will come and praise you as an eternal friend. You saved them in their moment of trouble. How will you use your worldly wealth? Will you use it to gain eternal friends? Will you use that which is ultimately nothing so others might gain that which is ultimately everything? Will you pursue the kingdom with the same zeal that the world pursues wealth? Are you willing to take the burden of others upon yourself? Are you willing to take the burden of others and help them bring it to Jesus so that they can be forgiven?

I love Your Kingdom, Lord. That’s what we sang this morning. I keep running up debts and Jesus keeps paying them. You and I have received grace upon grace. We have a recklessly extravagant God. When we don’t know where to turn, He draws us back to himself. Then He throws open the vault of heaven and welcomes us home. This great grace brings us peace with God. It brings us new life in Christ and it gives us a mission to share the promises of God with each other and with our children.