

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

“So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly... And I say to you make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.”

Unbelief cannot understand or interpret Scripture. To hear and rightly understand Scripture, which is to say to believe, is the gift of the Holy Spirit alone. Without the Spirit the Scripture is, as the Prophet Isaiah writes, “...like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I cannot, for it is sealed. Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, "Read this, please." And he says, "I am not literate.”

So do not hear the Words of our Lord to His disciples according to the fallen flesh. For the flesh would quickly turn these Words into something quite different than what our Lord intends. The Lord speaks in parables. Here He speaks to His disciples. Immediately before the parable of the Unjust Steward, our Lord speaks the Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and of the Lost Son, the Prodigal Son.

The fourth parable He speaks is that of the Unjust Steward. He then expounds on the parables by declaring “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much, and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?” This is the Lord’s summary, which is to say that this is the correct understanding, of the parable.

So in context the parable is clear, at least to those with faith. The man is not commended for being a bad steward, for squandering his master’s goods, for failing to account for the very goods he was in charge of, or for lying and cheating for his own benefit at the expense of his master. He did all those things. They are all wrong. Indeed, they are sinful. But he is not commended for them, although the flesh desires that he were.

Still, when the the unbelieving interpreters of Scripture see such a text, they can only see in it what Luther calls a “a priestly and monkish Gospel reading, which would be beneficial for supporting our greed...” So the Lord’s Words are fulfilled, for He said “I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”

Mammon is riches. And when your flesh hears of mammon, it rises to lust after it. To be rich in itself is not a sin. God is the Good and Gracious Giver of all good things. Abraham was quite rich by worldly standards, and he is the “father of the faithful”.

But to the flesh, to greed, to the sinful nature, to be rich is to be able to say “I will build greater barns.” and “soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease. Eat, drink and be merry...”. Regarding this text, also a teaching of Christ recorded by St. Luke, St. Augustine is credited with saying that the rich man would have found storage aplenty for his great quantities of grain in the stomachs of the hungry. And that is very much to the point of the Parable of the Unjust Steward.

The master in the parable commends the unjust steward not for thievery or carelessness or wonton disregard for his belongings, but for shrewdness. Not all stewards are unjust. But in his case his failings had left him proud and weak. Faced with the loss of his position, he was terrified. He stood to lose everything. And in that terror he used everything at his disposal – his wits, his master’s goods, the accounting entrusted to him, and other men – to insure that his future was secure.

Would the master commend you as shrewd? Or, let me ask that another way – have you been preoccupied, daily concerned, even totally focused on your future? Have you used everything at your disposal – your wits, your Master’s goods, that which has been entrusted to you, even those around you – to insure that your future is secure?

I am not referring to your retirement years. I am referring to your eternal future. And that is where the Lord’s parable brings the strong conviction of the Law to every man. Most men, save the slothful, spend a lot of time worrying about their temporal future. And those worries eclipse the importance of their eternal lives. So men dedicate themselves to earthly riches rather than heavenly riches.

And rather than graciously helping others with what they have, men hoard the gifts God has given them, turning those gifts into unrighteous mammon. And if you’re honest, you must confess that you have applied your shrewdness and your energies and your resources to the temporal rather than the eternal. You too have vowed to build bigger barns. For that, for greed, God, the True Master, commends no one. And for those lacking the commendation of God, eternity does not look inviting at all. All fallen men should feel terror.

But that you be saved, that you be rescued from your pride and greed, that you be forgiven your poor stewardship, One did give His all. He left the riches of heaven, and humbled Himself. Your eternal future was His every concern. He died for you. He settled your debt with God. In Him you have forgiveness and life. In Him there is no accusation against you, for the accuser is defeated. Believing in Christ, your eternal future is secure. In Christ, your eternal future is heavenly.

Although your debt to God was great, more than you could ever pay, in Christ your bill is marked “It is finished.” In Christ your account is paid in full. In Christ, the Master commends you. And in the shrewdness of faith, you hunger for the Word of God. In the shrewdness of faith, you confess your sins and receive the absolution Christ won for you. In the shrewdness of faith, you extend the forgiveness you have received to those around you. In the shrewdness of faith, you use the gifts God has given you to bless others. And God blesses you all the more.

In the shrewdness of faith, you eat and drink Christ. In Holy Communion you receive a taste of the heaven that will be yours, as you receive Christ’s Body and Blood. You are one with the heavenly host, with all the saints that have gone before. And when this life ends, together with your Lord, they will receive you into your everlasting home.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.