

"I tell you," Jesus says, "make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." With these words, Jesus is telling us--to put it a different way, asking us this question. How much does God mean to you? What would you be willing to give up for the sake of God, for the sake of the kingdom? Because in this world, Christians, we have many temptations. We have many things that we are facing. But what would you be willing to give up for God? Now, of course, we want to say right at the outset that this is not a question of salvation. Salvation is a free gift of God, not something that we earn. We cannot make God our friend by our actions. But if salvation is in fact that free gift, Christians, how much does that gift mean? If it came down to a decision between the world and God, what would you do?

That's what Jesus is asking us today by telling us this parable in Luke chapter 16. Because Jesus tells us that there was a rich man, and like many rich men of his time, he owned a tremendous amount of land. So much land, in fact, that there was no way that he was going to be able to take care of all of it by himself. He needed to have employees. He needed to have managers, just so that he could harvest everything. I mean, think of it even in our day. If someone owned this entire county, if someone owned all of Oliver County, even with tractors and machines, there is no way that one man could do all of that work. He had to have employees, someone who could help him manage his property. And that's what we see going on here, this man taking care of everything in place of his master. But we're also told he's not a very good manager. Now, we don't know why. Maybe he's embezzling. Maybe he's just lazy. But whatever the case is, Christians, this man cannot continue in his job. He's losing money for his employer. Like someone who's working on a factory floor as a foreman, if he isn't doing his job, he's going to lose money for his employers. And that just doesn't fly. We have to have production. We have to have someone who's going to do their job. So this man has to go.

But there is something a little bit different from our situation to his, because this man that we meet as a manager in the Gospel is in fact a slave. He is owned by his master. So it's not just like he can let everything go and decide to go on unemployment for a while until he finds another job. Everything that this man has, he gets from his master. The food which he eats comes from his master. The house which he lives in comes from his master. And if he has a family, probably even that family came from his master. He owes him absolutely everything. So that when he is losing his job, in other words, this isn't just something he can take care of in a few months. This is a life-and-death situation for him. He's facing the most critical moment of his life. To leave where he is probably will mean his death. This is also why, for example, he's so scared about the prospect of having to dig, because that would probably mean having to go to the mines. We have mines nearby. We know how dangerous that work can be, even with safety equipment that we have nowadays. But imagine if there was no equipment. Imagine if your workforce was considered expendable. To dig, in other words, was a death sentence for him. He would almost certainly die. So with this dire situation in front of him, he's wondering, what will the future hold?

What about us, Christians? Are we not also facing an equally dire situation? Because when it comes to our impending judgment, when God will call on us to give an account of the things that we have done, an account of how well we have handled his possessions, how well is that going to go for us? How well are we going to be able to stand in that day and face the Lord when he

comes to us asking us to give an account? Will you be able to say, "I did everything he wanted me to. I have done everything perfectly, Lord. I have no reason to be ashamed"? But if we look within our own hearts, I think we can see how easily that's not true. How quickly we had turned away from the Lord in so many things and how negligent we have been in the things of God! We are facing in the judgment of God an equally dire situation as this manager is facing with his own life.

So what does he do? He says, "I know what I'm gonna do! I've thought about it, and I need to make friends. I need to secure my future, so that when this finally all comes to an end--and I know it's coming to an end soon--I'll at least have somewhere to go. I'll have friends who can take care of me when my master turns me away." And so bringing his master's debtors to him, he begins to ask them how much they owe his master. The first one says to him, "A hundred measures of oil." That's a lot of oil, Christians. A hundred measures in our terms is something like 900 gallons. Not a small amount at all. And this amount that he is dealing with, in fact, in other places in the Bible is the kind of amount you would see with kings. We're dealing with a gigantic amount of money here. And so what does he say? He says, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write fifty." Just like that, 450 gallons gone. He certainly made a friend of his debtor, but not of his master. He says to the next one, "How much do you owe?" "A hundred measures of wheat." That's something like a thousand bushels, a large amount even for our day. And he says, "Sit down and quickly write eighty." Two hundred bushels gone and 800 which remain. This manager has paid an extremely high cost to make friends. He is willing to pay such a high cost, because he wants to make sure of his future. And he is willing to pay that high cost, because he wants to do whatever it takes.

What about you, Christians? How high a cost are you willing to pay for the sake of God? Are you willing to leave behind homes and fields for the sake of Jesus? Are you willing to leave behind possessions and money for the sake of God? Are you willing to lose everything that you have in this life, if only it means staying true to the Lord? I'm not asking this as a hypothetical question either, Christians. Just look at the world around you. See what the world is beginning to say about Jesus. Burning Bibles in Portland, saying all kinds of nasty things about Jesus. It's going to cost something to be a Christian. Are you willing to pay that cost? Are you willing to follow after God, no matter what it costs you in this life?

Now the manager, we are told, was received into the houses of his friends. He got what he wanted. He was willing to pay the cost, because, as Jesus says, the sons of this world, the sons of this age are wiser than the sons of light. In a sense, they only have a single master. They only have one goal, and that is their own desires. They are willing to pay whatever it takes to gain what they want in this life, because that is all that they have. Their god is their belly, as the Bible tells us. They are willing to pay any cost to get the things of this life, because they are so single-minded in their devotion. They know where their loyalties lie.

But where are your loyalties, Christians? Are your loyalties with God? Or are your loyalties with Mammon, with the things and the possessions of this life? I think that's what Jesus means. So often as Christians, because we are still in this world, we are sometimes conflicted, conflicted with who is really our master. We seek the things of this life. We seek the material things of this life, because we think that they will give us happiness, because we think that they will be

somehow able to help us even in the most dire of circumstances. But these things that you have, whose will they be tomorrow? These things that you have acquired for yourself, will they not crumble into dust and become nothing, because they are a part of this world? That's the trouble with riches, Christians, the trouble with material possessions. They deceive us. They trick us into wanting more and more and more, thinking that that's how we're finally going to get what we want. But they're nothing, and they won't last forever. So who is your master? Who do you serve? If you serve the things of this life, they will fail you, but God will never fail you. The things of this life, Mammon, will crumble into dust. It will become nothing! But God goes on forever. And Mammon promises so much. It promises a happiness that it cannot deliver. But God gives you a peace beyond all understanding, a peace which the world does not know.

So Christians, we are called to make friends with God with the things that we have, knowing that, like the steward, the things that we have been given will crumble into nothing. They will become dust, and we will have them no more. But when we serve God, using Mammon in this way, using unrighteous wealth in his service, then we will have a treasure which far exceeds anything of this life. God is in fact our dearest treasure, a treasure which knows no end, a treasure far beyond anything that this life can promise. Because God is our master. And God is the one who will take care of us, even when everything else has crumbled away.

So let us use the things that we have, Christians, in God's service. Let us use our money, our possessions, the things which we have, to help one another, to help the poor and the needy, to help the one who has some kind of lack. Let us build them up with the things that we have and support the work of the Gospel, because in so doing, putting these things into God's service, we are doing what he wants us to do. Don't trust in money. Money will come to nothing, just like heaven and earth will all crumble away. But trust in the Lord, who is far greater than anything this world can give. He is our treasure, Christians, because he is our eternal, faithful, and loving master.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.