

Sermon
No Slave can Serve Two Masters
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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church
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“Today’s gospel parable doesn’t play by the rules. A dishonest manager, a financial scandal, and a surprising twist—Jesus tells a story that feels more like a Wall Street thriller than a Sunday school lesson. If this parable were a headline today, it might read: ‘Corrupt CFO Pulls Off Bold Exit Strategy—Boss Applauds.’ It’s the kind of story that makes you do a double take. And Jesus wants us to.

The intrigue starts with a business manager who has mismanaged funds and caused harm to the business and the business owner takes swift action by firing him. What we don’t know is exactly what has transpired. Was it just poor performance or was it some kind of mismanagement that led to this employee’s gain? Don’t we see that frequently? Someone has skimmed monies off the top in some scandal – it happens daily. But we are not given that detail. Is that left out on purpose so we avoid making judgement against this accountant and just write this off as “the flesh is weak” kind of story – temptation and then dismiss because we know we would never do that...

We don’t know exactly what led up to this moment—but we do know one thing: the boss is not happy. And then, unexpectedly, we’re given a rare glimpse into what happens next. This is something we almost never see in our

headlines. Usually, the story ends here: the wrongdoer is exposed, justice is served, and the curtain falls. But not this time.

Instead, we watch as the fired employee—this disgraced manager—goes to the debtors, likely families weighed down by what they owe, and slashes their debts. No one asked him to. No one told him to. He just does it. And it's not like he wasn't already in deep trouble—so why take a risk that could make things even worse?

What was driving him? What was he hoping to gain? And more importantly, why did Jesus choose to tell *this* story, in *this* way? What reaction was he trying to stir in us?

The steward knows he no longer is able to do manual labor so somehow he has to prove his worth even after his termination. Perhaps he is trying to gain appeal from the community for himself, save his own reputation. Or perhaps he was on some level virtuous and thought he would try and help people one last time before leaving. But what is most likely his strategy is that by doing this, the business owner will gain a glowing reputation in the community thus gaining him future business, though it comes at a cost. Now to be sure, the steward was not rehired but I think we can assume he gained many new friends that day.

It's a strange story, no doubt. And if we're not careful, we might walk away thinking Jesus is endorsing shady business practices. But the sayings that follow—starting in verse 8b and running through verse 13—pull us back and clarify the message. The manager may be praised for his shrewdness, but

that doesn't mean dishonesty is celebrated. Quite the opposite: Jesus calls us to be faithful and trustworthy stewards of everything entrusted to us.

Still, there's a lament tucked into this teaching—a sorrow that God's people often lack the sharpness, the strategic wisdom, that others seem to possess when pursuing their own interests. Jesus isn't asking us to be dishonest, but he is asking us to be wise. To think ahead. To act with purpose.

And then comes the deeper invitation. In a surprising way, this parable points us toward something hopeful: that even money—so often a source of corruption and division—can be used to build relationships that matter. It's not about self-preservation. It's about generosity. About using what we have to help others flourish. That's the kind of stewardship Jesus is calling us to.

Let's look at that portion of this parable: *“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. ⁹ 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.*

¹⁰ “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. ¹¹ If, then, you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ 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.”

It is easy to assume that Jesus is leaning into the wealthy once again but not really – he is talking of what wealth can do to us or our fear of the opposite. When we are fearful of losing our living, our situations, our financial security if we are fortunate enough to have it, there can be a sense of concern and lack of generosity. Jesus is asking us to do well with our resources. This steward, in his self-serving likely response to that type of concern, inadvertently helped others by dispersing the wealth of his boss. The business owner had not considered the importance of caring for his clientele and the kind of value being kind brings to your life. And even though it was done by proxy, he seems to understand of it. But not in the way that Jesus intends. He responds as this is a good business move – but Jesus shows us that even when we respond from our sin, God can make it powerfully good. He took that ill-thought motivation of self-serving, and cared for the people who were suffering. God answers the prayers of the clientele through the self-serving actions of the terminated employee.

But perhaps I am being too harsh. Perhaps the steward was acting out of a sense of generosity. We don't really know for sure other than to say Jesus identifies him as unrighteous. But maybe he has seen the light – not by his own motivation, but by the good results that were had, and not by his kindness per se, but by the response of gratitude from the recipients.

And the closing comment: “You cannot serve God and wealth”. But, we can be strategic and wise with resources at our disposal. We do make an impact on the lives of those around us and on the world.

Today, during our luncheon we will be running video on the power of the Operation Christmas Child boxes and how these small things make huge impacts. We have engaged in this ministry for many years and literally more than a thousand boxes have been sent from this place to children around the world. We are not there to watch a child open one of our boxes but we donate and pack these boxes with tremendous faith that feeling valued and seen is most certainly felt by whomever the recipients are.

You will find pictures ready for your artistic touch placed on the tables. We hope to add a picture to each box. There is room on the page for you to add a note if you wish. We encourage you to either color them today or take some home with you and finish them.

Psalm 113 is a hymn of praise and reminds us to come to God in gratitude and reminds us that through God all things are possible. Reminding us that though God is the Creator of the Universe, God comes into our lives in unexpected ways always providing, always with just what is needed even at the hands of the imperfect.

Psalm 113 reminds us that the God who reigns also reaches. He's worthy of praise not just for His power, but for His mercy. Let that truth shape how you pray, how you serve, and how you see the world.