

Sermon by Pastor Michael Price on September 21, 2025

at Christus Victor Lutheran Church in Columbia, SC

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A dishonest parable, or a dishonest manager, or a dishonest master, or a dishonest wealth, I don't know. Somebody and something in this parable is dishonest. The word itself is unrighteous, unjust. It is the opposite of righteousness and justice. It is dishonest. It is on its very face not truth, not goodness, and not right.

If you are confused by this parable and its meaning, it's just you. Everybody else understands it. Nobody has any questions about it. You're all alone in your confusion. So don't shame yourself by being like, "I'm confused." We all get it. What's your problem?

I'm so glad you're laughing right now, because it is obviously something that I say in irony and silliness. It isn't true. All of us are confused by where this parable is taking us, and where it is going, and what does it mean, and what do I walk away with? Am I to celebrate this manager who is, by Jesus' own admission, dishonest?

When I was first reading this parable at the beginning, I never noticed that Jesus called the manager dishonest. I only noticed that he called the wealth dishonest. And it was only until later that I realized that he calls the manager dishonest as well.

But then he leaves open the possibility that the manager is faithful, and that maybe we should probably copy him and do stuff.

I am left utterly confused by this parable alone.

But what is not confusing is the way in which Jesus ends the parable, and the way the Pharisees react to the parable after that, and, believe it or not, it is connected to those famous three parables. Jesus is having the same conversation with the Pharisees and with the disciples when the Pharisees criticize Jesus of him hanging out with sinners and eating with them. And he gives them those famous three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.

This happens right after. Jesus turns his attention to the disciples, but obviously the Pharisees are still right there because nothing has stopped.

You know, and this is one of those things where modern readers like us, we have to be able to organize all of our thoughts, right? We've got to be able to organize where are we in the Bible? Well, we're in the, what is this? The 16th chapter? We're in the 16th chapter. Well, what verse are we in on? Well, we're in verse..., starting with verse one.

And so that's good to organize, but then what ends up happening is that we tend to forget that all of this stuff is connected. And they're all not just connected in terms of like ideas or connected to other ideas, but like the story. It's part of something grander going on.

The story itself is nestled, this conversation that Jesus is having is in the middle of a bigger conversation about God's grace and what God's grace will do.

Dishonesty, unrighteousness, unjust.

As I was sort of pouring through the different interpretations, I ran across an interesting..., I don't know. I ran across a couple of times where people were giving commentary and other such things, and

Jesus calls wealth dishonest. And again, that's a tamed down word. The word itself means unjust, unrighteous.

There were a few commentaries that quickly fast forwarded through the New Testament and said, "yes, yes, yes, but remember, the love of money is the root of all evil." And I gotta tell you, it hit me as a little dishonest.

Dishonest about what the Son of God is saying in this moment. Jesus doesn't qualify calling wealth dishonest. He doesn't stop and go, "yes, but we must remember, I don't really mean that."

He just calls it dishonest.

And there's something about the way in which Jesus leaves wide open the interpretation of this manager as to whether or not this manager is dishonest or this manager is somehow in his dishonesty faithful. So, there's something going on here that I think fundamentally, as human beings, we are very uncomfortable with. And the source of that discomfort is the very definition and difference about what is riches when it comes to God and what is riches when it comes to us. How is it that we are rich or poor is defined very specifically in our world. But how God defines riches is altogether a different thing. And because it is altogether a different thing, Jesus throws a parable at us that I think is meant to make us uncomfortable, both in the fact that we don't really know how to apply the right labels to the right things and people, but also as we dig deeper into what labels belong where, we get uncomfortable very quickly.

The implications, what I'm trying to say, and I think what Jesus is trying to say, God help me, but it is that when you take a look at the riches as defined by us, our money, our wealth, the things that we structure our life around, people become very clever.

Just yesterday, watching all of those very painful football games (oh my God, okay, everything's fine). Watching those very painful football games and some of the commercials that came on, one of them was a company that I use to manage my money. And it talked about how easy it is to do very complicated things to make your money work for you. These complex, artificially intelligent, technologically advanced, right at your fingertips, swipe up and your money will be able to grow immediately. How clever are we? How shrewd and witty we all are in crafting our technology and all of the things that we have and building an empire of finance.

I don't know if you know this, but there are three main companies that make an obscene amount of money. Energy, technology, you know what the third one is? And actually, I say it's the third one, I'm naming it last, but it's actually number 2. You know what the third one is? Finance. If you wanna make money, mmm, that's where it's at.

We are so smart, we are so clever, we are so resourceful, we are so witty, we are so shrewd with how we manage unrighteous wealth. Wouldn't it be something if we were able to be as imaginative, as creative, as advanced, working together so flawlessly and effortlessly, not for profit, but for the forgiveness of sin, for mercy, for the riches that belong to God?

Jesus gives us this parable in the midst of a conversation that begins with the fact that he sits with sinners and eats with them and freely distributes mercy. Throughout Christ's ministry he is never criticized by his contemporaries because he is too harsh with sinners, because he is too quick to punish the people who have violated righteousness. Instead, he is called out because he associates with those who violate righteousness and goodness and justice. And because he is more free and authoritative with God's mercy and the forgiveness of debts than Jesus' contemporaries.

I don't know if this manager ultimately is dishonest, or if this manager is somehow in some strange way, if you look at it kaleidoscopically or something, that this manager is someone who represents Christ, who is clever and resourceful at doling out mercy. But I think we're getting there. And we are left with clarity at the very end of this passage and parable, and at the very end of this conversation.

Yes, it is true, and many preachers, including myself and many others that I have heard throughout my life, quickly go to: it's not money that's evil, you see. It's the love of money that's evil. You see, it's the love of money that's evil.

I have preached the same thing. And perhaps give me another Sunday with another group of passages and I may preach exactly that.

But today, today I'm gonna stick with the words of Jesus that make us just make me just a little bit uncomfortable and he calls wealth unrighteous. And so I'll stay in that moment in order to imagine another kind of richness and another kind of wealth that will uproot us out of our typical way of thinking about where power comes from, where righteousness actually resides, and what God's riches and goodness actually mean. And that the truth of the matter is, there is something fundamentally different to God's riches and mine. I'll hold that for a second, but I'm talking about ours.

And to sit in the midst of that discomfort, I believe, is a way in which to understand the power and the goodness of God. And to understand that what Jesus proclaims as gospel, that the kingdom of God is at hand and is near to us. And that Jesus himself, his life, his death, his resurrection, is an embodiment of the way in which God's kingdom actually moves and reigns in the world.

That there is a fundamental rub against the ways in which we define all those things in life that we desperately pursue. And all those things that we apply our wits and our intellect and our creativity to in order to get some more. But I do think that the question remains, and the question that we ought to wrestle with as church continually and all the time, is the question of "what would it look like if we were as resourceful, as creative, as enthusiastic, as imaginative, as technologically advanced in the forgiveness of debt as we are in acquiring the debt for another?"

I don't have the answer to that question. I just know that that question makes me excited and fearful, terrified, and like I want to praise my God for having given us this kind of richness already.

We are the church and we are stewards and are called to be imaginative and creative with God's mercies, God's richness in love, the forgiveness of debts and the forgiveness of sin. It is a thumbing of the nose to unrighteous wealth. It is a deliberate stepping away from and walking away from the way in which we define life in general and it is a walking towards something that God has prepared from the very foundations of the world. Heaven is what we have called it. But the gospel of Jesus Christ is that heaven breaks into the earth, and God's reign looks completely different.

If you're still confused about the parable, again, you're all alone. Everybody else around you understands it. Everybody understands everything that I just said and the parable is just saying. You're all by yourself and you're confused and nobody else is confused. I'm kidding, of course. But I do think that that confusion that we share together in this parable in particular is, I believe, the birthing of the Holy Spirit to something else entirely where we might be able to imagine God's kingdom in a way that we hadn't before.

So, dear church, put your intellect and your creativity and your minds and your resourcefulness into what it means to God's mercy for the sake of the world. And perhaps there we will find the gospel of

Jesus Christ proclaimed to us yet again. In the meantime, come to the table of God's riches, lavishly given to you on account of Jesus Christ.

Amen.