In the passage that we just read, Jesus was telling a parable concerning one’s relationship with God in terms of how we manage our God given earthly resources…in particular our money! Believe it or not, biblical stewardship is a common topic that often came up throughout Jesus’ ministry and teaching. As early as Adam and Eve, their sons were asked to present their “first fruits” or the “first crop” before God as a sign of their offering. It is relevant back then, as it is even today. However, why has it become such a sensitive issue when we talk about money in the church? We do need money in order to keep things operational, don’t we? There is nothing wrong with money or wealth, it is the craving or the desire of it, that’s the root of all evil, as 1st Timothy reminds us.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 I think the real problem isn’t so much about the money itself, but how we mis-prioritize and mis-manage our resources that God has entrusted us with. The most common dividing issue of a church often deals with how money is being appropriated, or who has authority over it, while one exerts personal power, influence, and authority over others. They’ve placed their personal interests first before God’s interests for the people and for the world.

 As we read from our passage last week, God does seem to have an unusual twist when it comes to wealth or resource management. This came upon a series of parables that Jesus told, regarding the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost (or the Prodigal) Son. It appears that God values the 1 that are being lost at the expense of the other 99. It doesn’t seem fair or make any sense, does it? But as I explained last week, our emphasis should not be upon the ONE individual, but the ONE as a whole, the whole body, along with the rest of the 99. The emphasis should be upon the interest of the whole rather than the individuals. The unity of the body outweighs the needs of a few individuals, and certainly not whoever can speak the loudest or exert greater influence upon the others.

 In our text this morning, Jesus was addressing the exact same dynamic before a group of tax-collectors and Pharisees and scribes. The subject of managing material wealth was no strangers to these groups. But Jesus wasn’t referring to the material (earthly) wealth that they were familiar with, he was talking about the spiritual wealth…how we ought to manage our spiritual wealth.

 Our **material wealth and spiritual wealth often go hand-in-hand**. Unfortunately, we live in an age when we measure people’s worth by their material wealth, or their statuses in power and authority, instead of by their spiritual wealth. We judge one another based on others’ outward appearances rather than the integrity of their hearts, and their individual gifts and talents contribution to the society as a whole. **Our spiritual wealth defines who we are through our personal character, our integrity, and our trust in God.**

 In our story this morning, Jesus made the transition from the Lost (or Prodigal) Son back in Chapter 15 to our dishonest and shrewd money manager. Both of them have squandered and mismanaged the resources that they were entrusted with either from their father or their master. In both cases, the father and the master did extend their gracious compassion by offering them opportunity to redeem themselves, even though they had failed to meet their expectations in managing their material wealth as well as their spiritual wealth. Let’s take a look at this more closely…

 In some translations, our passage today was entitled - “the Parable of the Dishonest (or the Shrewd) Manager”. The manager’s job was to make sure that he collects what was rightfully belonged to his master, along with interests. But the manager has been slacking off with what he was supposed to do. So he took matters into his own hand in hope to recover a portion of what belongs to his master. But actually he had other ulterior motive. Hecut a series of deal reducing the amount of debt that was owed by the debtors. It appears that he was being wise in cutting deal with the debtors, but he knew exactly what he was doing. He knew what he was doing. He was trying to manipulate his power and influence over those debtors for his own personal gain, at the expense of those who can least afford. He was looking out for his own future knowing that he would probably soon be fired by his master, for his own failure and neglect. Now the debtors owe the manager a favor to him because he reduced the amount of debt that they owed. This was all part of his selfish scheme. All he cared was what’s in it for himself? What does he get out of this?

So why was Jesus telling this rather complex and multi-faceted parable? Well, keep in mind that he was talking among a group of tax-collectors, and the Pharisees and the scribes at that time. These tax-collectors were like the shrewd and dishonest manager, skimming off the top and cheating off the common folks. They were the middle men between the Roman government and the people, collecting more than they should while pocketing the extra for themselves. That’s why everybody disliked them.

 As for the Pharisees and the scribes, Luke had labeled these Pharisees as the “***lovers of money***” in verse 14. As the leaders of synagogue, keepers of the temple’s treasury. They were the ones calling all the shots. Like the dishonest manager they too had forgotten their calling and mis-managed what ultimately belongs to God. They were looking after their own interests and personal gains rather than contributing and sharing what they have with others. They were indulged by the worldly temptations of **power, status,** and **wealth** for their own personal gain.

 As Jesus reminded us, in our parable today that God has called upon us to be the “children of light”[[2]](#footnote-2), so therefore, we must manage our spiritual wealth wisely in order to honor God and to serve God’s people. That’s our ultimate goal in our calling. Each day, we ought to recount God’s blessings and in turn we share those blessings with others, instead of keeping them to ourselves.

 In the same way, the Apostle Paul reminded us that “*those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction****. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,*** *and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. 11 But as for you, shun all [of] this;* ***pursue Righteousness, Godliness, Faith, Love, Endurance, [and] Gentleness****.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

These are the spiritual wealth that God has given to us all. So let us use them wisely and accordingly to God’s benefit and not our own.

 From a more practical standpoint, we often express our worries about the sustainability of our future. We demonstrate our lack of faith and trust, when we complain about not having enough, when in fact God has given us more than we ever need. We might think our cup is ½ empty rather than ½ full. Our passage today simply challenges us to be good stewards of what we’ve been entrusted with. Let us not be pre-occupied and indulged obsessively with our material needs but focus upon managing our own spiritual wealth, as mentioned before instead. Again, they are “Righteousness, Godliness, Faith, Love, Endurance, and Gentleness.”

 As Jesus taught **“*No one can serve two masters, for a servant will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. We cannot serve God and wealth.”[[4]](#footnote-4)***

 By letting go of what we have in our possession, gives us the freedom to trust in God’s providence and that God will bless us even more than what we have. As one theologian who commented on our text this morning wrote “*somehow in the middle of our journey we stopped living for Christ. We stopped believing that Jesus died and was resurrected and that life was made new. Somewhere along the way it became easy to serve all those pressing demands: of people, of schedule, of money. Somewhere along the way, the vision for God’s call became cloudy and muddled. We stopped hearing God’s voice and joined the crazy survivor-takes-all mentality. Somewhere along the way, the challenges seemed so much bigger than the answers. So we huddled in an effort to save whatever was left and forgot about living for something greater. We [have] buried our treasures.”*

As Jesus said, ***“It is more blessed to give than to receive****.”[[5]](#footnote-5)*God has given us the abundance of resources, more than we ever need…yet somehow we crave for more and reluctant to share with others. God has entrusted all of us to be the managers of God’s rich resources, not just in terms of finances, but also our time, and our talents. So let us not squander our lives and our abilities to serve others through our talents.

 With every choice we make, it comes with the assurance that our sovereign God is ultimately in control. **Our heavenly riches are far more valuable than the earthly wealth.** The question is, “Which master do we ultimately serve and honor? Do we choose to serve God or to be held hostage by what our world has to offer?

 **Like the shrewd manager, let us use the earthly resources that we are entrusted with, to benefit others by strengthening our relationships and furthering God’s kingdom and purpose here on earth, as it is in heaven?** May we strive to seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness first, so then all these things will be added unto us.[[6]](#footnote-6) Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *I Timothy 6:10* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Luke 16:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *1 Timothy 6:9-11* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Luke 16:13* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Acts 20:35* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Matthew 6:33* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)