

The Dishonest manager

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 24, 1995. Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

① Jesus finds something commendable in all of us. Jesus looks at us. He sees everything in us that displeases God and keeps us from being the men and women God's wants us to be. But he also sees in each one of us something of God's image. None of us is as bad as we could be. Not even Hitler was as bad as he could have been. Jesus finds something commendable in all of us - even when we can't find anything commendable in ourselves. D. L. Moody, the great evangelist, had that Christlike ability. Moody was traveling by train one day. The man across from him was drunk. He'd take a bottle from his coat-pocket periodically and take a swig. At some point the man must have felt that he was being selfish. He held up the bottle and looked at it longingly. Then he held it out for Moody. "Have some." Moody graciously responded, "No thank you, I don't drink. But I can see that you're a very generous man." None of us is as bad as we could be. Jesus finds something of God's image in each one of us.

② Jesus finds something commendable in the dishonest manager he talks about in our Gospel lesson. Jesus doesn't commend the manager for his dishonesty. He commends him for his shrewdness. He was clever. "Why should the world have a monopoly on cleverness?" Jesus asks. "Use your heads! Think! Attack the roots causes of poverty and crime and warm. Be clever! I've given you the resources you need. Find new, creative, clever ways to share the gospel with unbelievers."

③ Let's revisit the story of the dishonest manager. "A rich man had a large

department store. Somebody accuses his manager of incompetence. The rich owner calls the manager to the corporate headquarters. "What's this I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer." In other words, "Hand over the books. You're fired!" The manager knows he can't waste a moment. He returns to his office, shuts the door. He pushes the "do not disturb" button on his telephone. He begins to think. He uses his head. "What can I do? I have a wife and kids. I have bills to pay. What can I do?"

↳ Number one option: "I could dig ditches." He takes out a piece of paper and reaches for a pencil. He jots down, "Digging." But then he thinks, "I can't dig. I'm fifty years old. I'm overweight. I'm out of shape. I'm not strong enough to dig. I'd have a heart attack. I wouldn't last a day." So he takes his pencil and crosses out "digging". Option number two: "I can beg. I'll get a white cane. I'll get a tin cup. I'll get some dirty old clothes and sit outside the train station. I'll beg." The more he thinks about begging, though, the more unhappy he feels. "I can't beg. I'm ashamed to beg. My wife and kids would be so humiliated. I'd rather starve than beg." He takes his pencil and scratches out begging.

↳ C. Time is running out. He has only a few hours to hand over the books. "What am I going to do." He thinks. A light bulb flashes on in his mind. ^{He's not strong enough to dig. too proud to beg. He can't cheat} He gets out the ledger and looks at all the names that have overdue accounts. He picks up the telephone. He dials. "Hello, Sam. This is Dave from the Department Store. I see you owe \$3000 for your new carpet. I have a deal for you. Come down to the store

in the next hour with \$1,500 cash and I'll close out your account. After all, what are friends for?" And so it goes all day. He takes a fraction of the money owed and writes, "Paid in full!" in the ledger. Day ends. He's out of a job. But he has dozens of friend who will take them into their homes. He was a dishonest but clever man. "Be as clever as that dishonest manager", Jesus says. "Be honest. But use your heads. Think. There's poverty in the world. Racism. Disease. Men and women dieing who don't know about God's love and grace and mercy. Use your heads! Think! Use your money! Use your possessions! Use every resource God has entrusted you with." The Lord will one day say to each of us, "Give me an accounting of your management."

5 Today we baptize Seth Curtis, the son of Gene and Julie Alport. Infant baptism reminds parents and all church members that we must give account of how we've carried out responsibilities towards our children. Most parents plan carefully for their children with respect to their physical and emotional and social welfare. You start a savings account when a child is born to provide for your child's financial security. That's wise. That's using your heads. You read stories to your children and spend time playing to provide for your children's emotional and intellectual health.

6 *But sometimes his parents don't think ahead when it come to relationships to $\frac{1}{2}$.*
And Christian parents teach their children to pray. Read Bible stories to them every night. Bring them to Sunday School and Church. Get them involved in choir and youth group. You model Christlike behavior. You try to answer their often difficult questions about who God is. The Lord has given us the job of

bringing up these children. These children are God's children. Jesus loves them. And the Lord trusts us to raise them to know and love him.

③ One day each of us must give an account of how we've raised our children. We'll have to give an account of how we use our wealth and possessions and mind and talents. God calls us to be faithful with what we have. We might not have a lot. We may not stop a war. We may not discover a cure for cancer. We may never write a symphony. We may never advise a president. We may never be in the position to contribute a million dollars to a charity.

But God calls us to be wise in managing what we have. We may have the opportunity to do nothing more than to feed the neighbors cat, write a note of appreciation, invite a friend to church, teach a Sunday School class, watch the nursery, visit someone in the hospital, put your tithes and offerings in the plate.

"But", Jesus says, "whosoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much."

④ God has put us in charge of our lives, our families, our possessions, our time and talents. ~~Let's use~~ our heads. ~~Let's~~ Manage wisely all that God has given us. One day we'll have to give an account to the Lord. The question will not be "How much money did you make? How big was your house? How many cars? The question will be, "What have you done with what I entrusted to you. Have you served me with what I have given you."