

We are either slaves to God or we are slaves to mammon. Mammon is material wealth. Those who serve mammon have material wealth as their god. This is what they fear, love, and trust in the most. This is where they find their security. And they will do all they can at all times to make sure that they have it. But those who serve God are those who find their only true security in the loving care of their heavenly Father through the merits of Christ their Lord. They find no rest or peace in anything else.

Jesus tells a parable of an unrighteous manager. He was in charge of his master's belongings, but he had been unfaithful. And yet, this manager knew that he needed security and comfort. Though he was about to get fired, he was determined to find security in the little bit of material wealth and comfort he could get. So he made a plan to lessen the debts of those who owed his master money. He did this quickly before his master came. He knew that judgment was coming, that he was going to lose everything. So he did everything he could in order to come away with a bit of security in this life.

This unrighteous manager was shrewd. That is to say, he was clever. He was so clever that even his master, while firing him, had to admit this much. He got away with not having to do hard labor or beg for the rest of his life. He escaped the judgment of losing out on the pleasures of this life. He made friends who would take him into their homes so that he could at least survive in this world.

Jesus tells this parable in order to illustrate to us that the unbelievers are quite good at getting the security and comfort they desire so much. They serve mammon. They cherish earthly, worldly comfort. And they will go to great lengths to make sure that they do not go without it.

The drunkard finds his comfort in his bottle of booze. And he will do whatever he can to make sure that he gets this fix. He is afraid of losing out on that high, because he cherishes the numbness of alcohol more than anything else. So even if he must lose everything else, he will make sure that he gets what he thinks he needs. The prideful man wants recognition and acceptance from others. And he will use whatever he can to get it. Even if he has to give the impression that he is a good Christian, if this means that others will respect him and look up to him, then he will do it. Folks will use good things in order to get what their hearts truly desire, but they don't really care about these good things. For example, people get married not in order to honor God by living a chaste life, but only to get a bit of earthly security, a nice wedding, or status among their peers. Or if they can get these things without the commitment of marriage, then they will do that too. Natural man's determination to satisfy his carnal desires has no rivals in this world.

And this is Jesus' point. The sons of this world are shrewder in their generation than the sons of light. Unbelievers are better at getting comfort from their false gods than Christians are at getting comfort from the true God. This is to our shame. How determined are we to make sure that we are satisfied and comforted with the true riches of God's Word and Sacraments? Would a drunkard pass up free booze? Would the passion-filled youth pass up sex with his girlfriend without having to marry her first? How many people would pass up receiving praises from others and being honored by their peers? So why do we pass up hearing and learning God's Word? Why would we, even for one week, pass up the free gift of Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins and nourishment of our souls?

Or what town will let its favorite team get cut from the school's program? Even those churches who don't believe the Bible is true will still go to great lengths to keep their doors open just so they can keep their vain social clubs, show off their good deeds to the world, and have some sense of spiritual vibes to sooth their bad consciences. And yet, how determined are we to make sure that the pure gospel of our

Lord Jesus Christ, who alone takes away the sin of our conscience, is proclaimed among us? Sure, it's only one Sunday service, one home devotion that we're missing. That's not such a big thing. But as Jesus says, he who is unfaithful in a little is also unfaithful in much.

When we hear our Lord's words that this unbelieving world is shrewder than we are, we should all be driven to repentance. But within Jesus' words of rebuke are also great comfort for us. He teaches us what it is that actually belongs to us. If you are unfaithful in what belongs to another then who will give you what is your own? In other words, if you serve earthly riches and pleasures – things that pass away and leave you no inheritance – then how will you enjoy those true, heavenly treasures which have been given to you freely? Within this warning is also great consolation. God has in fact given you the true riches. He has sent his own Son into the flesh to save you from sin, death, and all the accusations of the law. He has baptized you into his own name. He has provided his pure Word and Sacrament to be preached and administered to you. While we see in ourselves the unthankful, selfish, lazy, sinful flesh, we also find that God continues to provide what we need so much. He continues to send out his Word to proclaim that Christ's sacrifice for our sins still avails before him for our sake.

The true riches are the pure teaching of the Holy Scriptures, which reveal to us Christ our Savior. If we have these true treasures then we are free. We are free from the terror of losing out on this world's pleasures. We are free from worrying about what others think of us. We are free from fretting over what we will eat and drink. Because we have the greatest pleasure in God's favor toward us. We are already honored by God and given his own name in our baptism. We know that the God who provides seed for the sower and bread for food is the God who gave up his own Son so that he might feed us with the bread of life and increase our harvest of righteousness. It is already ours by faith in his name.

Jesus calls it unrighteous mammon because the unrighteous are slaves to it. But through faith in Christ we are free. We are not used by it as we remain slaves to earthly pleasures. Instead, Jesus teaches us to use our earthly wealth to make friends. These are not friends who come and go. They are not political allies who promise us cushy positions if we scratch their backs. No, these are friends who receive you into everlasting habitations. They are honest with you about your sinful condition, because they know their own sinful condition. They are therefore not timid to confess to you the truth, which has freed them from the slavery of this world's greed. They find great comfort in the Word of Christ, which saves their souls from sin and condemnation. Their only treasure is the pure doctrine of your Lord, revealed in the Scriptures, and summarized in the Catechism.

These are the friends God graciously gives us. As the hymn goes:

Lord, let me win my foes  
With kindly words and actions,  
And let me find good friends  
For counsel and correction.  
Help me, as You have taught,  
To love both great and small  
And by Your Spirit's might  
To live in peace with all.

So pray that you would be surrounded with such friends. When you confess the truth then you find those who love to confess it as well. When you teach it to your children, then in them you will reap a

harvest of friends who comfort you with the truth of Christ in your darkest days. Whatever material blessings or pleasures in life God so graciously gives you, let your priority be these Christian friends who comfort and encourage you with the Word of Christ. Because at the end of your life, what do you have? All other things pass away. They will fail, as Jesus says. But God's Word never fails. And there is no greater blessing than being surrounded by those who actually believe God's Word and are not shy to speak it to you, especially when you are dying. As David says at the end of Psalm 142, "The righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me."

If we believe that there is no greater treasure than to hear God's Word of forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation as we stand in the congregation of the saints, then nothing can compare to what we enjoy here in this place. Nothing can compel us more to give what we can with our time, our money, and our prayers so that this great treasure might continue among us. God has richly blessed us by allowing his Word and Sacraments to remain pure among us so far. As the shrewd manager was quick to secure his own security, we should be even quicker to feed on God's Word every chance we get. We should be desiring the body and blood of our Savior more and more, yearning to hear again and again his pledge of peace flowing from his pierced side and sealed on us in our baptism. We should not be ashamed to beg our heavenly Father to provide this great treasure for us even more. Because he himself teaches us to pray earnestly that he would guard this inheritance of his saving truth. So let us pray:

A pledge of peace from God I see  
When Thy pure eyes are turned to me  
To show me Thy good pleasure.  
Jesus, Thy Spirit and Thy Word,  
Thy body and Thy blood, afford  
My soul its dearest treasure.  
Keep me  
Kindly  
In Thy favor,  
O my Savior!  
Thou wilt cheer me;  
Thy Word calls me to draw near Thee.

Amen.