

The Most Perplexing Parable: September 21, 2025

This is a splendidly confusing parable... **[1 Confusing]**
That Jesus has put on us today.

It's one of those stories...
That makes me want to say...
Let's not talk about this...
Let's talk about the weather...
Or the Broncos...
But not this...
It's too hard.

But alas.
We can't just hold up the verses...
That we want to pick and choose...
In order to meet our own agenda...
Or our own ideas...
Or our own comfort.

We call that proof texting.
And it is not a faithful way to read the Bible.

We NEED to struggle.
With God's Word.

After all... Jesus...
Who told this story...
Was and is the Son of God.
And we are not...

So we ought to expect...
That some of his ideas...
Are going to be hard to grasp.

But before we dive in...
I want to tell you a story...
That's going to make you ask...
Are you sure you're a pastor...
Can I see the papers that prove it.

Here we go.

When I was a young person...
I did not have the best home life...
There was a father who abandoned me...
And another father who was abusive...
Very few male role models...
Who cared about me.

But my brother Larry...
Was older than me.

He is 14 years older...
To be exact.

When I was early teens...
He was adult-ish...
Kind of...
So sometimes...
I would hang out with him.

And there were some really good things...
He taught me.

For example... he taught me about grace.
The time we were chopping wood...
And not knowing my own teenage strength...
I threw a piece of wood into the back of the truck...
But a little too far.. and a little too hard.

The split log...
Went through the back window of the truck.
And I was certain... he would be furious.
But I was wrong.

He looked at me and said...
That's ok. I've always wanted...
One of those sliding glass windows...
To throw my beer cans...
Into the back of the truck.

Iowa.

The other thing I remember... **[2 Late Night]**
Is that he used to come home from work...
Very late at night.
And I would be waiting...
And we would talk.

We would speculate and wonder...
About the nature of the universe...
Life on other planets...
What God was like...
How we could solve world's problems.
And the biggest question on my mind... what's the deal with girls.

We covered all the major mysteries.

And I remember a couple times...
Late at night... when minds were running wild and free...
We talked about... now... this is the bad part. **[3 Bank Robber]**
Robbing banks.

Not that we would ever rob a bank...
But we talked about how you would do it... in theory.

How you would circumvent the locks and the technology...
How you could do it without ANYONE getting hurt...
How you could get away with the crime.
And live the rest of your life... sitting on a beach...

And inside my twisted little head...
There was nothing wrong with that discussion...
Because the banks were owned...
By people who were rich...
By people who exploited other people...
For their own personal gain...

By people who didn't care...
About the well-being of the Little People...
Like me.

So imagining something bad...
Was not bad... it was more like... JUSTICE?
Because in these ridiculous late night plans...
We were sticking it to the man...
In our imaginations... **[4 Robin Hood]**

Like modern-day Robin Hoods.

But before you express your shock... about my teenage confession...
Please know... that this kind of story...
Is a cultural archetype...
It's a recurring theme...
In our media... tv and movies.

I can name... a whole bunch of movies...
Right off the top of my head...
That teach us... it's ok...
It's actually cool...
To steal from the rich.
To get what we want...
To fulfill a twisted sense of justice.

Oceans Eleven.
The Italian Job.
Now You See Me.
Tower Heist.
And many many more...

But just because...
It's a cultural story...
Doesn't mean it's ok.
Doesn't make it right.

In fact... this idea promotes...
A position of moral relativity.

That it's ok to do bad things...
To bad people.

We can steal from the immoral rich...
Because they are bad people...
And somehow that puts us...
On the side of righteousness.

As though we can do...
Whatever we want to do...
Whatever we think...
Needs to be done...
In order to make things right...
In our own minds...
In the world.

And besides...
They deserve it.

Ok. Ready?
In today's gospel lesson...
Jesus tells a story...
About how the world works.

There was an employee...
Who was a BAD employee.
In the story... Jesus says...
This manager was SQUANDERING... **[5 Squandering]**
The boss' resources.
Wasting money and time...
That did not belong to him.

The word SQUANDERING is important.
Because it's the same Greek word Jesus used...
When he told the story of the Prodigal Son...
In Chapter 15 of the gospel of Luke.

He said... the son had SQUANDERED...
His father's money in dissolute living.
The prodigal is just like the manager...
In the parable we have today...

They both wasted...
What didn't belong to them.

However... their reactions were vastly different. **[6 Prodigal]**

The Prodigal Son came to himself.
Realized that he had sinned against God...
And his father.

Realized that he in fact...
Had not been a good son...

Had not been faithful with his resources...
Had not done anything good with what he had been given.

He had been rotten through and through.
And he knew it.
So he fell on his knees...
And asked for forgiveness.

Now... compare that to the reaction...
Of the Dishonest Manager... **[7 Shrewd]**
He did not come to himself.
He did not admit he was wrong.
He did not ask for forgiveness...
Or a second chance.

See this was his opportunity...
To make things right.

He had been confronted by reality...
He had been shown the error of his ways.
He had a choice to make. It was his choice.
He could have confessed and moved on with life.

Instead... he had an inner dialogue...
What am I going to do?
I am not strong enough to dig.
I am ashamed to beg.

I'm not going to work hard.
I'm not going to humble myself.
And I'm not going to ask...
For a second chance...

AHA! I know... I'll do something bad...
I will even further misuse my position...
My responsibility...
My access to resources...
That do not belong to me.

I will eliminate a portion...
Of other people's debts...
Owed to my master...
So that... they will like me.
And give me a place...
And provide for me.
After I lose my job.

So. He follows a bad work ethic...
With bad behavior...
All at the expense...
Of someone else.
His first thought... was...
How can I save my own bacon???

And here's the real kicker.
The boss... the rich man... the master...
Doesn't have him arrested...

He commends him... for being shrewd.
Are you kidding me?
This story makes absolutely no sense.
This cannot be a parable...
That Jesus wants us to embrace.

I've heard some people say...
Jesus is telling us to be shrewd...
With the resources of this world...
Like the people who are dishonest... are shrewd.
Be dishonest with your worldly wealth.

What?!?!?!? Jesus would not say that.
It doesn't fit... with all his other teachings.
It doesn't make sense... within the context...
Of the Gospel of Luke...

Who generally speaking...
Is very concerned with the disparity...
Between the rich and the poor.

I think the key to everything...
Is the next sentence.
It's not the story anymore...
It's the interpretation. **[8 Dishonest Wealth]**

Jesus says... 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.

There are two things...
I want to point out.
First... the dishonest wealth...
Like all wealth has no eternal value.
There is nothing inherent about wealth...
That has a direct connection...
To our salvation.

Like you've heard so many times before...
You can't take it with you.

So Jesus says... when it is gone.
It's gone. It will be gone forever.
It will have no power...
To affect your eternal well-being.

The second thing is...
He says... make friends...
Who can welcome you...
Into the eternal homes.

Well... do you know anyone...
Who owns an eternal home?
Like a nice little acreage on the rolling hills of heaven.

Of course not!
We are creations of the earth. We are temporary.
Our money is temporary.
Our homes are temporary.
Everything we have is temporary.

I don't have an eternal home to give you.
In fact... it's not mine to give.

There is only one... who has what is eternal.
Only God. That's it.

So this sentence... **[9 Seriously]**
I sincerely believe...
IS Jesus... being funny...
Or ironic. Or sarcastic.
Or just pushing the edge.

Saying... go ahead...
Trust wealth. Bribe friends.
Do whatever you think you can do...
To take care of yourself... by worldly means...
And see where that gets you.

Then he gets to the real point...
Of this whole convoluted story.
He says...

If you're faithful in the little things...
You will be faithful in much.

If you're dishonest with little things...
You will be dishonest with big things.

And who is going to trust you...
With true riches...
Things that have value...
That transcend these earthly bounds. **[10 Two Masters]**

You can't serve two masters.
You can't love God...
And money.
You have to choose.

And I know that is the point of this whole parable...
Because of the reaction it causes in the crowd.
We don't have verse 14 as part of our reading today...
But in my humble opinion... that is a mistake.

It says... very clearly...
The Pharisees, who were lovers of money,
Heard all this, and they ridiculed Jesus.

This story made the Pharisees who loved money... mad.
Which was what Jesus was trying to do.

Make them mad.
Make them think.
So they will repent.
So they won't squander...
The chance they have...
To come back to God.
And receive God's love and forgiveness.

Which is the only way...
Love and forgiveness...
Through Jesus... from God...
For us all.

It's the only way...
To make things right.

It's the only way...
To have an eternal home.

It's the only way...
To eternal peace.

Thanks be to God.
Amen!