

WISDOM OF THE SHREWD MANAGER

The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.

*For the sons of this world are more **shrewd** in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."*

Shrewd -- φρόνιμος see also Matthew 10:16 "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

If we sang this hymn last week, or even a week before last, you could easily understand why. Candidates for baptism and confirmation were wearing white robes to symbolize the righteousness of Christ they now wear unto eternal life. It is the righteousness of Christ that is the dress code for heaven. We see them, as John reveals to us in Revelation, those clothed in white robes waving palm branches in praise of the King. But today? Saints Arrayed in White? Singing of the hope of heaven? Some might be wondering what the "Host Arrayed in White" has to do with today's message. If you're wondering I'm glad. I want you to wonder but not for long.

Re-consider the tale of this shrewd manager. He thought of his future. He planned, using the earthly means that he had, to use towards his future. Now we Christians, do we think of our most important future? It is heaven? Do we plan to do what is important now for getting there? More than that, are we resourceful, intelligent and tactful in the way we plan? In other words, "Are we shrewd?"

Be certain that Our Master Jesus certainly wasn't praising the shrewd manager for his dishonesty! He wasn't praising him for using wealth to gain friends! Nevertheless Jesus was praising him. Verse 8 "The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light". The virtue of being shrewd isn't one we immediately think of as we list off Christian virtues. Meekness, humility, sacrifice, love, more easily come to mind. But the acquiring of a certain shrewdness is on the Lord's mind more than once. He says to his disciples as recorded in Matthew 10:16 "...be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves". (NIV) To be shrewd is often misunderstood as being wrapped up in dishonesty. But to be shrewd as Jesus teaches us to be shrewd is to be intelligent, cautious, resourceful and above all tactful.

The shrewd manager did three things well. He saw his future. He used all his present wealth and position to plan for it. He did it in a shrewd, intelligent, cautious and tactful way. It is good for us to contemplate all three points.

Do we, as sons of light, stop to contemplate our future? Do we meditate on the "eternal dwellings" spoken of in our text and sung in our hymns. Every Sunday and this fact alone that

it is Sunday should be cause enough to sing of heaven. We don't consider it enough. We lose sight of the prize. We forget what is truly important.

It is truly liberating to live knowing that our heavenly home awaits. How many trials do we experience here? How often is our faith is challenged? How frequently do our bodies struggle through sickness and weakness? Time constrains us and ages us. But thanks be to God because when heaven is on our minds we can take on a new attitude! For example, one attitude such as Paul's who writes for all true Christians saying,

For our light and **momentary troubles** are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Even if we were to live the full 969 years of Methusala in challenge, struggle, testing and pain, God might give us the insight into the meaning of eternity so that we could see even that as just a fleeting moment in time. In the context of eternity it is nothing.

Still, though troubles are momentary, we see ourselves as not just waiting for it all to be over, but rather working hard and harder still because we have just a small window of opportunity for doing good.

We must **work** the **works** of him who sent me while it is day; **night** is coming, when **no** one can **work**. (John 9:4)

Now how shall we work? How shall we occupy ourselves in this brief time?

The shrewd manager did some dishonest dealings in eliminating debts. He was banking on his Master's mercy to honour the dishonest stroke of his pen taking an IOU for 100 measures of oil and by a stroke of a pen, has the debtor make it only 50. He takes another IOU, this time for 100 measures of wheat and takes off 20% and with a stroke of a pen says, make it 80. He lowers debt so that he might have an earthly home to live in.

We need some debts to be eliminated also. They aren't the debts of others but our own. By our sins, Satan rightfully has a claim over us. But an honest manager comes in the person of Jesus Christ our Saviour. He takes our IOU's worth far more than 100 measures of wheat or oil. These are IOU's for an eternity of servitude in Satan's realm. But the Saviour comes and pays the eternal price, not with just words but by the fulfillment of his Word. He pays the price in his precious blood shed upon the cross for our sins. Know that you are redeemed, says God's Word, not by silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:18).

But by what means does our Saviour's blood come to us? By what means are they applied to us personally? Remember the hymn "Behold the hosts arrayed in white"?

And in the flood of Jesus' blood
Are cleansed from guilt and shame

Their robes are washed in the blood of Jesus. They are the white robes of baptism.

Much has been made of the oil and the wheat. Oil is for anointing. Wheat is for bread. We are anointed with the Holy Spirit in baptism. We partake of the bread of salvation in the Lord's Supper which is His body. The dishonest manager used oil & wheat to secure a temporal home. We use oil and wheat as earthly elements in the sacraments to secure an eternal dwelling. It is hardly imaginable that by a stroke of a pen, working with oil and wheat, the dishonest manager could achieve so much. It is more of a mystery of how with mere water, bread and wine – in other words, Word & Sacrament Our Saviour can achieve for us so much.

Martin Luther anticipated such wonder concerning the power of the Sacraments so he included the question: "How can water do such great things?" He could have as easily have asked the same question concerning the Lord's Supper. How can bread and wine do such great things? To such questions we can respond "Certainly not just water or bread or wine can do such things but the word of God in and with the water, bread and wine does these things along with the faith which insists this word of God in the water, bread and wine. The earthly elements in the sacraments become powerful because they are connected with the command and promise of God. Do this for the forgiveness of sins. And whenever there is forgiveness of sins there is life and salvation."

And so with earthly means so much may be achieved. Much can be achieved with the oil, wheat, water, bread and wine. So now, here is the last point of the manager's talents. He looked forward. He used the earthly means he had to help him achieve his future objective. He did so in a shrewd way.

The manager was quiet and diligent. He went quietly from one debtor to another. Take your bill of 100 measures owing, he said "Write down quickly 50". "Write down quickly 80". He did not waste time trying to negotiate. He did not waste time lamenting the would haves and could haves of the past. He used the means he had as quickly and effectively as he could. He refused to doubt that his actions would have some effect.

With our means at our disposal we have greater confidence. With the Sacraments we have the promise of God. Concerning baptism we hear: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16)". Concerning the Lord's Supper we hear "Drink of it all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28 etc.)". God's promises have always been fulfilled. Nowhere can he be shown a liar. Concerning our Lord, no witnesses could be shown to agree in their testimony against him. He was the perfect Lamb of God.

God has revealed the day of Judgment to each and every one of us as surely as the Master revealed a day of Judgement to the shrewd manager. He saw his future. Do we? He took earthly means to prepare for eternity. Do we take the earthly means in the sacraments, revere them and consecrate them for holy use to secure a heavenly future for ourselves? Do we instruct others to do likewise? Thirdly, are we shrewd about it? The shrewd manager worked

quietly effectively and without doubt. When we apply the sacraments in our lives do we partake without doubt, quietly and effectively? Do we demonstrate confidence?

May God grant to us all the shrewd quiet confidence of the shrewd manager in applying the earthly means of the sacraments to God's Word to secure an eternal home in heaven. May that certain, quiet confidence stand as a witness to the world who is watching us concerning the hope that is within us.

Grant these virtues Lord, unto us all.

Amen.