

Luke 10:1-13
September 21, 2025

Supreme

In my younger days, like most people, I used to consume large amounts of pizza, at least larger than I presently do, which is universally recognized as among the world's favorite foods. One of the features that makes it popular is its variety.

One can get thin, hand-tossed, or a deep dish crust, and an almost endless variety of toppings. Some people like exotic combinations, like Hawaiian pizza, which has pineapple on it. Many people are in the habit of ordering the same combination on a regular basis. The most popular the world over is simple; pepperoni and cheese with a tomato sauce base. One of the other options is the pizza supreme.

A supreme pizza is one that is loaded with a large variety of toppings: pepperoni, sausage, bacon, ham, black olives, onions, peppers, mushrooms, anchovies, jalapeños, all of that and more, maybe two or three different kinds of cheese. It is the all at once version of pizza.

Some preachers believe that each message should have only one point, like a one-topping pizza. In some cases this seems sound. Could there be exceptions? Is there such a thing as a sermon Supreme?

One of the features of the teaching style of Jesus was the telling of stories, or to have an encounter with someone; and then to accompany the story with a

brief saying, sort of like a punchline, clarifying the main message of the story. Scholars call them, "aphorisms."

Actually this method of teaching is not unique to Jesus. It has been attributed also in American life to people like Benjamin Franklin, and others:

"Penny saved is a penny earned."

"Actions speak louder than words."

"An apple a day, keeps the doctor away."

"Better safe than sorry."

"Don't judge a book by it's cover."

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

"The early bird gets the worm."

I could go on, but I am sure you get the idea. Some examples from the gospels are:

"The last shall be first, and the first last."

"To the one who has much, more will be given; and to the one who has little, even what he has will be taken away."

"Let the dead bury their own dead."

"If anyone wants to be my disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

The Golden Rule is an aphorism, and so are the Beatitudes;

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

“Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.”

Lest I forget;

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted,”

“Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone,” and, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness after his baptism, he hurled them at Satan;

“Man does not live by bread alone.”

“Worship the Lord Your God and serve him only.”

“Do not put the Lord Your God to the test.”

One of the most interesting parables in the collection of stories that are told by Jesus in the gospels is the one read in our presence this morning; it is the Parable of the Shrewd Manager. It is not surprising that at its conclusion there is an aphorism, but in this case there is more than one.

In most cases, these short sayings appear one at a time, and less often in clusters like in the Beatitudes, like a pizza supreme, a sort of Aphorism Supreme, and that is the case with the Parable of the Shrewd Manager:

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”

“If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?” “And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?” (I feel like this one can be reversed, “If one has been unreliable and irresponsible with one’s own property, who will trust them with theirs.”)

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”

We see at least two points, trustworthiness and inner unity, a lack of inner division. But then there is another, and if there is one that serves as the umbrella in this smorgasbord, it is this one;

“You cannot serve both God and money.”

It is good to be clear about the steward in this parable. He was not a very good person. He is not presented as an example worth following. He is not a role model, neither for Christians nor anyone else. He was not commended in a way that saved him with regard to his master. We are told only that he was clever in the face of self-induced trouble.

We are not told about what happened to him, whether or not he was discharged. The idea that Jesus mentions is that he ingratiated himself with his master’s clients by lowering the price, which could not have benefited his master. All this so that when he was

fired, he would have someone to whom he could turn, somewhere to go.

At this point Jesus makes the case that while believers are on earth they *will* have to deal with money and its implications, and it should be used wisely. Though the steward was dishonest and unjust, and shrewd, there is no call for believers to be dishonest and unjust, only wise.

Then Jesus lays on the toppings, ending, of course, with the mandate that also appears in the Sermon on the Mount, “You cannot serve both God and money.” This does require a little soul-searching, *for we all have and use money*, it is a part of the world’s way of organizing economic relationships. On the eternal scale of things, economics does not retain a place of importance, it is secondary at best, while in the world it primary and has a great deal of importance.

It is clear that the bible, as God’s Word to us, *charges us with the mission of being* in the world, *this world* driven by money and economic concerns, but not according *its* values, rather according to eternal values, which are often found in contradiction because they make relationships primary.

The *Good News* is that God is gracious, forgiving, and kind, that where we have failed God pardons, and it tells us that the failures are treated as an educational experience, as a time of learning. The Spirit guides us towards maturity so that our hearts may be near to God’s heart, as so that our actions can follow.

One more thing that honesty compels. In this cycle of parables, Jesus is in the presence of the Pharisees; the good faithful religious people who sometimes double down on the world’s ways. In the 14th verse, they are accused of being . . . “lovers of money,” which means that for all their religious devotion they had lost their way when it comes to economic things. He does not chide them for how far away they are from God’s Kingdom, but for how close they are.

How close we all are, for we also live in this world and are caught up in its ways while at the same time live in the presence of Christ, under the grace of God.

So let us remember that it is possible to live a fulfilling life in the world if our faith is real and are hearts are in the right place, which reminds me of one of the other aphorisms of Jesus that also addresses the world’s attachment to money and its things:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.” And one more topping on this message supreme. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.”

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