

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

LUKE 16:1-9.

This sermon appeared during the years 1522 and 1523 in eight editions. It was translated first into Latin in 1522, and again in 1525.

Contents:

The defense of the true doctrine, concerning faith, works and the merits of the saints against the objections of the papists.

Luke 16:1-9K.J.V.

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

1. Although in my Postils hitherto, and in my little book, Christian Liberty and Good Works, I have taught very extensively, how faith alone without works justifies, and good works are done first after we believe, that it seems I should henceforth politely keep quiet, and give every mind and heart an opportunity to understand and explain all the gospel lessons for themselves; yet I perceive that the Gospel abides and prospers only among the few; the people are constantly dispirited and terrified by the passages that treat of good works; so that I see plainly how necessary it is, either to write Postils on each gospel lesson, or to appoint sensible ministers in all places who can orally explain and teach these things.

2. If this Gospel be considered without the Spirit by mere reason, it truly favors the priests and monks, and could be made to serve covetousness and to establish one's own works. For when Christ says: "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles;" they force from it three points against our doctrine of faith, namely: first, against that we teach faith alone justifies and saves from sin; second, that all good works ought to be gratuitously done to our neighbors out of free love; third, that we should not put any value in the merits of saints o,' of others.

3. Against our first proposition they claim the Lord says here: "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness," just as though works should make us friends, who previously were enemies. Against the second is what he says: "That they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles;" just as though we should do the work for our own sakes and benefit. And against the third they quote: "The friends may receive us into the eternal tabernacles;" just as though we should serve the saints and trust in them to get to heaven. For the sake of the weak we reply to these:

I

FAITH ALONE MAKES US GOOD, AND FRIENDS OF GOD

4. The foundation must be maintained without wavering, that faith without any works, without any merit, reconciles man to God and makes him good, as Paul says to the Romans 3:21-22: "But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe." Paul at another place, Romans 4:9, says: "To Abraham, his faith was reckoned for righteousness;" so also with us. Again, 5: "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Again, 10:10: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." These, and many more similar passages, we must firmly hold and trust in them immovably, so that to faith alone

without any assistance of works, is attributed the forgiveness of sins and our justification.

5. Take for an illustration the parable of Christ in Matthew 7:17: “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.” Here you see that the fruit does not make the tree good, but without any fruit and before any fruit the tree must be first good, or made good, before it can bear good fruit. As he also says, Matthew 12:33-34: “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by its fruit. Ye offspring of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things?” Thus it is the naked truth, that a man must be good without good works, and before he does any good works. And it is clear how impossible it is that a man should become good by works, when he is not good before he does the good works. For Christ stands firm when he says: “How can ye, being evil, speak good things?” And hence follows: How can ye, being evil, do good things?

6. Therefore the powerful conclusion follows, there must be something far greater and more precious than all good works, by which a man becomes pious and good, before he does good; just as he must first be in bodily health before he can labor and do hard work. This great and precious something is the noble Word of God, which offers us in the Gospel the grace of God in Christ. He who hears and believes this, thereby becomes good and righteous. Wherefore it is called the Word of life, a Word of grace, a Word of forgiveness. But he who neither hears nor believes it, can in no way become good. For St. Peter says in the Acts 15:9: “And he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.” For as the Word is, so will the heart be, which believes and cleaves firmly to it. The Word is a living, righteous, truthful, pure and good Word, so also the heart which cleaves to it, must be living, just, truthful, pure and good.

7. What now shall we say of those passages which so strongly insist on good works, as when the Lord says: “Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness?” And in Matthew 25:42: “For I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat.” And many other similar passages, which sound altogether as though we had to become good by works. We answer thus:

8. There are some who hear and read the Gospel and what is said by faith, and immediately conclude they have formed a correct notion of what faith is. They do not think that faith is anything else than something which is altogether in their own power to have or not to have, as any other natural human work. Hence, when in their hearts they begin to think and say: “Verily, the doctrine is right, and I believe it is true,” then they immediately think faith is present. But as soon as they see and feel in themselves

and others that no change has taken place, and that the works do not follow and they remain as before in their old ways, then they conclude that faith is not sufficient, that they must have something more and greater than faith. Behold, how they then seize the opportunity, and cry and say: Oh, faith alone does not do it. Why? Oh, because there are so many who believe, and are no better than before, and have not changed their minds at all. Such people are those whom Jude in his Epistle calls dreamers, 5:8, who deceive themselves with their own dreams. For what are such thoughts of theirs which they call faith, but a dream, a dark shadow of faith, which they themselves have created in their own thoughts, by their own strength without the grace of God? They become worse than they were before. For it happens with them as the Lord says in Matthew 9:17 “Neither do men put new wine into old wine-skins; else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled.” That is, they hear God’s Word and do not lay hold of it, therefore they burst and become worse.

9. But true faith, of which we speak, cannot be manufactured by our own thoughts, for it is solely a work of God in us, without any assistance on our part. As Paul says to the Romans 5:15, it is God’s gift and grace, obtained by one man, Christ. Therefore, faith is something very powerful, active, restless, effective, which at once renews a person and again regenerates him, and leads him altogether into a new manner and character of life, so that it is impossible not to do good without ceasing. For just as natural as it is for the tree to produce fruit, so natural is it for faith to produce good works. And just as it is quite unnecessary to command the tree to bear fruit, so there is no command given to the believer, as Paul says, nor is urging necessary for him to do good, for he does it of himself, freely and unconstrained; just as he of himself without command sleeps, eats, drinks, puts on his clothes, hears, speaks, goes and comes. Whoever has not this faith talks but vainly about faith and works, and does not himself know what he says or whither it tends. For he has not received it; he juggles with lies and applies the Scriptures where they speak of faith and works to his own dreams and false thoughts, which is purely a human work. Whereas the Scriptures attribute both faith and good works not to ourselves, but to God alone.

10. Is not this a perverted and blind people? They teach we cannot do a good deed of ourselves, and then in their presumption go to work and arrogate to themselves the highest of all the works of God, namely faith, to manufacture it themselves out of their own perverted thoughts. Wherefore I have said that we should despair of ourselves and pray to God for faith as the Apostle did. Luke 17:5. When we have faith we need nothing more, for it brings with it the Holy Spirit, who then teaches us not only all things, but also establishes us firmly in it, and leads us through death and hell to heaven.

11. Now observe, we have given these answers, that the Scriptures have such passages concerning works, on account of such dreamers and selfinvented faith; not that man should become good by works, but that man should thereby prove and see the difference between false and true faith. For wherever faith is right it does good. If it does no good, it is then certainly a dream and a false idea of faith. So, just as the fruit on the tree does not make the tree good, but nevertheless outwardly proves and testifies that the tree is good, as Christ says, Matthew 7:16: "*By their fruits ye shall know them*"--thus we should also learn to know faith by its fruits.

12. From this you see, there is a great difference between being good, and to be known as good; or to become good and to prove and show that you are good. Faith makes good, but works prove the faith and goodness to be right. Thus the Scriptures speak in the plain way, which prevails among the common people, as when a father says unto his son: "Go and be merciful, good and friendly to this or to that poor person." By which he does not command him to be merciful, good and friendly, but because he is already good and merciful, he requires that he should also show and prove it outwardly toward the poor by his act, in order that the goodness which he has in himself may also be known to others and be helpful to them.

13 So you should explain all passages of Scripture referring to works, that God thereby desires to let the goodness received in faith express and prove itself, and become a benefit to others, so that false faith may become known and rooted out of the heart. For God gives no one his grace that it may remain inactive and accomplish nothing good, but in order that it may bear interest, and by being publicly known and proved externally draw every one to God; as Christ says, Matthew 5:16: "Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Otherwise it would be but a buried treasure and a hidden light. But what profit is there in either? Yea, goodness does not only thereby. become known to others, but we ourselves also become certain that we are honest, as St. Peter in 2 Peter 1:10 says: "Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure." For where works do not follow a man cannot know whether his faith is right; yea, he may be certain that his faith is a dream, and not right as it should be. Thus Abraham became certain of his faith and that he feared God, when he offered up his son. As God by the angel said to Abraham, Genesis 22:12: "*Now I know, that is, it is manifest, that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.*"

14. Then abide by the truth, that man is internally, in spirit before God, justified by faith alone without works, but externally and publicly before men and himself, he is justified by works, that he is at heart an honest believer and pious. The one you may call a public

or outward justification, the other an inner justification, yet in the sense that the public or external justification is only the fruit, the result and proof of the justification in the heart, that a man does not become just thereby before God, but must previously be just before him. So you may call the fruit of the tree the public or outward good of the tree, which is only the result and proof of its inner and natural goodness. This is what St. James means when he says in his Epistle, James 2:26: “Faith without works is dead.” That is, as the works do not follow, it is a sure sign that there is no faith there; but only an empty thought and dream, which they falsely call faith. Now we understand the word of Christ: “Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness.” That is, prove your faith publicly by your outward gifts, by which you win friends, that the poor may be witnesses of your public work, that your faith is genuine. For mere external giving in itself can never make friends, unless it proceed from faith, as Christ rejects the alms of the Pharisees in Matthew 6:2, that they thereby make no friends because their heart is false. Thus no heart can ever be right without faith, so that even nature forces the confession that no work makes one good, but that the heart must first be good and upright.

II.

ALL WORKS MUST BE DONE FREELY AND GRATUITOUSLY, WITHOUT SEEKING GAIN BY THEM

15. Christ means this when, in Matthew 10:8, he says: “Freely ye receive, freely give.” For just as Christ with all his works did not merit heaven for himself, because it was his before; but he served us thereby, not regarding or seeking his own, but these two things, namely, our benefit and the glory of God his Father; so also should we never seek our own in our good works, either temporal or eternal, but glorify God by freely and gratuitously doing good to our neighbor. This St. Paul teaches the Philippians 2:5: “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.” That is, for himself he had enough, since in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and yet he served us and became our servant.

16. And this is the cause; for since faith justifies and destroys sin before God, so it gives life and salvation. And now it would be a lasting shame and disgrace, and injurious to faith, if any one by his life and works would desire to obtain what faith already possesses and brings with it. Just as Christ would have only disgraced himself had he

done good in order to become the Son of God and Lord over all things, which he already was before. So faith makes us God's children as John 1:12 says: "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name." But if they are children, then they are heirs, as St. Paul says, Romans 8:17, and Galatians 4:7. How then can we do anything to obtain the inheritance, which we already have by faith?

17. But what shall we say of passages that insist on a good life for the sake of an external reward as this one does: "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness?" And in Matthew 19:17: "But if thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments." And Matthew 6:20: "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." We will say this: that those who do not know faith, only speak and think of the reward, as of works. For they think that the same rule obtains here as in human affairs, that they must earn the Kingdom of heaven by their works. These, too, are dreams and false views, of which Malachi 1:10, speaks: "Oh, that there were one among you that would shut the doors, that ye might not kindle fire on mine altar in vain!" They are slaves and greedy self-enjoying hirelings and day laborers, who receive their reward here on earth, like the Pharisees with their praying and fasting, as Christ says, Matthew 6:2. However, in regard to the eternal reward it is thus: inasmuch as works naturally follow faith, as I said, it is not necessary to command them, for it is impossible for faith not to do them without being commanded, in order that we may learn to distinguish the false from the true faith. Hence the eternal reward also follows true faith, naturally, without any seeking, so that it is impossible that it should not, although it may never be desired or sought, yet it is appropriated and promised in order that true and false believers may be known, and that every one may understand that a good life follows naturally of itself.

18. As an illustration of this take a rude comparison: behold, hell and death are also threatened to the sinner, and naturally follow sin without any seeking; for no one does wickedly because he wants to be damned, but would much rather escape it. Yet, the result is there, and it is not necessary to declare it, for it will come of itself. Yet, it is declared that man might know what follows a wicked life. So here, a wicked life has its own reward without seeking it. Hence a good life will find its reward without any seeking it. When you drink good or poor wine, although you do not drink it for the taste, yet the taste naturally follows of itself.

19. Now when Christ says: make to yourselves friends, lay up for yourselves treasures, and the like, you see that he means: do good, and it will follow of itself without your seeking, that you will have friends, find treasures in heaven, and receive a reward. But

your eyes must simply be directed to a good life, and care nothing about the reward, but be satisfied to know and be assured that it will follow, and let God see to that. For those who look for a reward, become lazy and unwilling laborers, and love the reward; more than the work, yea, they become enemies of work. In this way God's will also becomes hateful, who has commanded us to work, and hence God's command and will must finally become burdensome to such a heart.

III.

IT IS NOT THE SAINTS, BUT GOD ONLY WHO RECEIVES US INTO THE ETERNAL TABERNACLES, AND BESTOWS THE REWARD.

20. This is so clear that it needs no proof. For how can the saints receive us into heaven, as every one himself must depend on God alone to receive him into heaven, and every saint scarcely has enough for himself? This the wise virgins prove, who did not wish to give of their oil to the foolish virgins, Matthew 25:9, and St. Peter, 1 Peter 4:18, says: *"The righteous is scarcely saved."* And Christ in John 3:13: *"And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of Man, who is in heaven."*

21. What then shall we reply to: "Make to yourselves friends out of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles?" We say this: that this passage says nothing about the saints in heaven, but of the poor and needy on earth, who live among us. As though he would say: why do you build churches, make saints and serve my mother, St. Peter, St. Paul and other departed saints? They do not need this or any other service of yours, they are not your friends, but friends of those who lived in their days and to whom they did good; but do service to your friends, that is, the poor who live in your time and among you, your nearest neighbors who need your help, make them your friends with your mammon.

22. Again, we must not understand this reception into the eternal tabernacles as being done by man; however, men will be an instrument and witness to our faith, exercised and shown in their behalf, on account of which God receives us into the eternal tabernacles. For thus the Scriptures are accustomed to speak when they say: sin condemns, faith saves, that means, sin is the cause why God condemns, and faith is the cause why he saves. As man also is at all times accustomed to say: your wickedness will bring you misfortune, which means, your wickedness is the cause and source of your misfortune. Thus our friends receive us into heaven, when they are the cause, through our faith shown to them, of entering heaven. This is enough on these three points.

23. In this connection we will explain three questions, that we may better understand this Gospel. What is mammon? Why is it unrighteous? And why Christ commands us to imitate the unjust steward, who worked for his own gain at his master's expense, which without doubt is unjust and a sin?

24. First, mammon is a Hebrew word meaning riches or temporal goods, namely, whatever any one owns over and above what his needs require, and with which he can benefit others without injuring himself. For Hamon in Hebrew means multitude, or a great crowd or many, from which Mahamon or Mammon, that is, multitude of riches or goods, is derived.

25. Second, it is called unrighteous, not because obtained by injustice and usury, for with unrighteous possessions no good can be done, for it must be returned as Isaiah 61:8, says: "For I, Jehovah, love justice, I hate robbery with iniquity." And Solomon, Proverbs 3:27, says: "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it." But it is called unrighteous because it stands in the service of unrighteousness, as St. Paul says to the Ephesians 5:16, that the days are evil, although God made them and they are good, but they are evil because wicked men misuse them, in which they do many sins, offend and endanger souls. Therefore, riches are unrighteous, because the people misuse and abuse them. For we know that wherever riches are the saying holds good: money rules the world, men creep for it, they lie for it, they act the hypocrite for it, and do all manner of wickedness against their neighbor to obtain it, to keep it, and increase it to possess the friendship of the rich.

26. But it is especially before God an unrighteous mammon because man does not serve his neighbor with it; for where my neighbor is in need and I do not help him when I have the means to do so, I unjustly keep what is his, as I am indebted to give to him according to the law of nature: "Whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them." Matthew 7:12. And Christ says in Matthew 5:42: "Give to him that asketh thee." And John in his first Epistle, 1 John 3:17: "But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" And few see this unrighteousness in mammon because it is spiritual, and is found also in those possessions which are obtained by the fairest means, which deceive them that they think they do no one any harm, because they do no coarse outward injustice, by robbing, stealing and usury.

27. In the third place it has been a matter of very great concern to many to know who the unjust steward is whom Christ so highly recommends? This, in short, is the simple

answer: Christ does not commend unto us the steward on account of his unrighteousness, but on account of his wisdom and his shrewdness, that with all his unrighteousness, he so wisely helps himself. As though I would urge some one to watch, pray and study, and would say: Look here, murderers and thieves wake at night to rob and steal, why then do you not wake to pray and study? By this I do not praise murderers and thieves for their crimes, but for their wisdom and foresight, that they so wisely obtain the goods of unrighteousness. Again. as though I would say: An unchaste woman adorns herself with gold and silk to tempt young boys; why will you not also adorn yourself with faith to please Christ? By this I do not praise fornication, but the diligence employed.

28. In this way Paul compares Adam and Christ saying: “Adam was a figure of him that was to come.” Romans 5:14. Although from Adam we have nothing but sin, and from Christ nothing but grace, yet these are greatly opposed to each other. But the comparison and type consist only in the consequence or birth, not in virtue or vice. As to birth, Adam is the father of all sinners, so Christ is the father of all the righteous. And as all sinners come from one Adam, so all the righteous come from one Christ. Thus the unjust steward is here typified to us only in his cunning and wisdom, who knows so well how to help himself, that we should also consider in the right way the welfare of our souls as he did in the wrong way that of his body and life. With this we will let it suffice, and pray God for grace.

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