

September 25, 2022

Sermon Manuscript

1 Timothy 2:1-15

¹ I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. ⁷ And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

⁸ Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. ⁹ I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰ but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Luke 16:1-13

¹ Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’

³ “The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg—⁴ I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’

⁵ “So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

⁶ “‘Nine hundred gallons of olive oil,’ he replied.

“The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.’

⁷ “Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’

“‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied.

“He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

⁸ “The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

¹⁰ “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. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹² And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?

¹³ “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. You cannot serve both God and money.”

Thank God For Biblical Scholarship

The good news I want to proclaim this morning is that the Holy Spirit uses scholarship from the Communion of Saints as one means for continuing to lead us into all Truth.¹ And this is critical for overcoming ways we may have been blinded from a scripture’s true meaning. The scriptures read for us this morning included two passages that have a history of being particularly difficult. The second half of our passage from 1 Timothy 2 on women has often been misunderstood by the Church to great harm

¹ On the night before Jesus went to the cross, Jesus famously told his disciples that He had much more to say to them, but that it was more than they could bear at that time. So, He promised that when the Spirit of Truth came He would guide Jesus’ disciples into all truth; that is, the Holy Spirit of God who now dwells in all believers. (John 16:12-13)

So ever since that time, over the last two thousand years the Holy Spirit has been continuing to work in the Church to give a fuller understanding of the Scriptures, so that today we have the benefit of the writings from Church scholars of the past and present to draw on: the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s work through the Communion of Saints to aid us in coming to know God and His Truth more deeply.

of wild animals, vegetation, and childbirth; the temple to Artemis was the most significant structure in the city; and for many reasons the worship of Artemis was more significant for women than men. So I want to explain just a few of those reasons and why more recent scholars have begun contending that in this passage is Paul addressing some problems in the Church with women who were recent converts to Christianity *from the cult of Artemis*.

First, as Artemis was a female deity, women who worshiped Artemis were expected to dress up in a manner that imitated her, which included braiding their hair and other fanciful dress. So this would explain why, in verse 9, Paul is specifically encouraging women in the Church to dress distinctly from those who are loyal to Artemis.⁸

Second, there is strong evidence that the legend of Artemis had become linked in Ephesus with Isis, the Egyptian goddess of fertility.⁹ And key to our passage: the myth about Isis taught that women were the author of men and therefore were superior to men in religious understanding. Peppiatt suggests this may have led to women who were newer converts to Christianity being overconfident about their religious knowledge in comparison to men and asserting themselves accordingly. If so, this would explain why Paul is declaring these women should “learn in quietness and full submission,” because these need to spend time learning the faith before they can teach it.¹⁰ But this would also clarify why Paul then brings up Adam & Eve in the way that he does. When he notes in verse 13 that “Adam was formed first, then Eve,” he is doing that to counter the Isis myth that men should be subordinate to women. And when Paul then writes that “Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner,” he is not blaming Eve for all human sin, but simply suggesting that women are no less vulnerable to being deceived than men (in contrast to what the myth of Isis may have claimed).

And all of this finally leads us to verse 15 and Paul’s seemingly off-the-wall comment about women being saved through child-bearing. While Artemis was believed to be the goddess of childbirth (and midwifery),¹¹ rather than looking out for expectant mothers, expectant mothers feared her. This is because she was believed to be the one who determined whether a mother in childbirth would live or die, to the extent that she even became known as a “savior” for those giving birth.¹² And so, imagine the women being taught throughout their lives not to tick off Artemis, or else risk dying in childbirth. But then imagine these women *had* believed the gospel and converted to Christ. It’s understandable that they might be vulnerable to weak faith when it came to childbearing and might still want to keep a foot in both religions. So Peppiatt explains that in verse 15 Paul is encouraging them to trust not in Artemis to preserve their lives through the process of childbirth, but to seek the Lord’s protection. Paul is saying that women will be saved - not in a spiritual, eternal life sense - but saved in the sense of being preserved through childbearing.

So what this all points to is that there were women in the church at Ephesus whose faith remained impacted by their past devotion to Artemis, both in remaining influenced by those heretical teachings and inhibited by fear that Artemis would seek vengeance upon them during childbirth. Therefore, Paul’s instructions here are not to be read as prohibiting women for all time from teaching in Church, but only these women in the first century Church of Ephesus who were recent converts from Artemis worship. So

⁸ Additionally, women in Ephesus were also expected to perform public good deeds and make generous donations out of *eusebia*, a Greek word meaning piety to the Artemis and the gods. However, in verse 10, Paul goes on to encourage “good deeds” with a different motive: the whole end of that verse that reads “appropriate for women who profess worship to God” is essentially one word: *theosebia*. So instead of good deeds of *eusebia*, Paul’s telling them to do good deeds for *theosebia*, for God’s glory.

⁹ The clusters around Artemis’ chest & torso are believed to be symbols of fertility, but not to be eggs or breasts, but rather sacrificial bull testicles. See <https://stephenmillerbooks.com/uncomfortable-question-goddess-artemis/> and <https://www.thoughtco.com/artemis-of-ephesus-116920>

¹⁰ And indeed, the Greek for “I do not permit” in verse 12 is typically used more in the sense of disallowing in a situation rather than prohibiting it for all time.

¹¹ Artemis was the virgin daughter of Leto and Zeus who oversaw the 9 day birth of her brother Apollo

¹² More specifically, Artemis was believed to be able to either deliver a mother and child safely or to dispatch a mercy killing for the mother if the labor was too long and painful.

isn't it good news that the Holy Spirit uses the scholarship of the Communion of Saints as one means for continuing to lead us into all Truth? There are so many women who have been marginalized as a consequence of the historic context of passages like this not being understood. Indeed, I know of women (and men) whose confidence in scripture's authority has been undermined or have even abandoned the faith because of ways this passage has been taught that they can't square with a loving God. For these and other reasons, we must seek to remain humble, rather than certain, about our knowledge of the Truth and curious to continue learning more. The good news is that the Holy Spirit uses scholarship from the Communion of Saints as one means for continuing to lead us into all Truth.

But it is not only our ignorance of scripture's historic setting that can hinder our grasp of the Truths revealed in scripture; the influence of values from our present day culture can also obscure the Bible's truths from our sight. And the parable we heard from Luke 16 today is a prime example of this. Given the influence of how our society trains us to view work & wealth, readers in the West are often uncomfortable with this parable - or even embarrassed by it - because of how it seems like Jesus is upholding a dishonest employee as an exemplar. So we'll get into that, but first let me briefly explain the dynamics at play in the parable.

As Jesus tells it, there was a rich landowner who would rent parcels of his land to farmers, who would pay their rent to him not with money, but by giving him some of their crop - an agreed upon amount - once it was harvested. And it was typical for a landowner like this to have a manager who made these agreements, kept written records of them in account books, and ensured the agreements were fulfilled when the crops came in.

But in this parable, word gets around to this landowner that his manager wasn't doing a good job, which leads him to bring the manager in and tell him to turn in his books, because he was being fired. And yet, this manager didn't really have any other means of employment, so he was up a creek; he really couldn't afford to lose this job. So he shrewdly devised a scheme that would enable him to keep it. Before turning in his books and before anyone found out he'd been fired, the manager went to the renters and reduced the amount they owed to the master. To the debtor with olive orchards, the manager cut what he owed the master from 900 to 450 and to the man who owed a thousand bushels of wheat, he cut it to 800. These debtors - the renters - didn't know the manager had been fired, so they assumed he was doing this on the landowner's behalf. So that day would've been a very good day for these debtors and all those who worked for them. The villagers would've been overjoyed; heck, they probably went and stood outside the rich man's house and began singing, "For he's a jolly good fellow!"

And the reason this was so shrewd of the manager is because in an honor-shame culture like first century Israel, what was even more important than accruing wealth was to be seen as honorable and generous. And what this manager did had instantly *boosted* the rich man's honor and therefore put the master in a bind. As scholar Kenneth Bailey¹³ explains, the rich man could go to the debtors and explain this was either he could say that it was all a mistake, that the steward had been fired, "and thus his actions were null and void. But if the master does this *now*, the villagers' joy will turn to anger, and he will be cursed for his stinginess" and viewed as dishonorable. *Instead, now* in order for the master to retain this newfound honor the rich man now will have to let the manager *keep* his job. And the rich man *knows this*. So verse 8 says, "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly." And then Jesus explains that it is this virtue of shrewdness that he is commending to His followers, saying (in v8b), "For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light." But many Western readers are often so scandalized, that Jesus seems to be holding up a dishonest employee as an exemplar, that it causes Jesus' point here to become obscured and we miss it.

¹³ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, Eerdmans 1976, 1983.

Scholar Chris Green¹⁴ explains that there are two reasons for this that both stem from the values of the “Protestant Work Ethic,” which Americans have all been influenced by, whether we’re Protestant or not. First, the Protestant Work Ethic promises us that if we work hard and honestly this will result in success and our advancement.¹⁵ In other words, we believe that those who behave morally in their jobs should be rewarded. So it makes sense to us that the master would’ve fired this manager for wastefulness. But this doesn’t leave much room for us to view shrewdness as a virtue, if shrewdness means using cleverness to outsmart others or game the system. So it seems outrageous to us that the manager might be able to retain his job through cleverness, let alone be held up as an example by Christ in a story *he made up*.

But a second factor obscuring this parable’s meaning for us is the way the Protestant Work Ethic has erased for many a distinction Jesus repeatedly made: between the pursuit of worldly wealth and the pursuit of His Kingdom. This distinction is clear in verse 11, when he says “So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?” And then it is affirmed in verse 13, when He asserts that “No one can serve two masters... (that) you cannot serve both God and money.” But since the Protestant Work Ethic promised Westerners that being moral employees would lead to advancement & success, this produced the notion that wealth actually signifies morality; a fruit of this now is Americans’ tendency to assume a wealthy person is better than a poor person. But when we read the second half of verse 8, we have to remember the distinction that Jesus has made and that He is assuming that his followers are not pursuing worldly wealth, but pursuing the true riches of his Kingdom. And in His Kingdom, shrewdness is a virtue. Elsewhere He tells his disciples to be as shrewd as a serpent, but as innocent as a dove.¹⁶ So He doesn’t want us to mimic the manager’s dishonesty - that is not a virtue of the kingdom - but he does want us to be shrewd like him, but for the Kingdom’s sake. And what does that look like? It means being clever or creative in how we outsmart the powers of the world that seek to exploit and crush people, and in how to parlay our privilege into bringing about blessing for those who have less than us.¹⁷

So isn’t it good news that the Holy Spirit uses scholarship from the Communion of Saints as one means for continuing to lead us into all Truth, that we might gain understanding of passages that would otherwise leave us confused?

Since shrewdness is less recognized as a virtue in our society, this is one of the key ways we as western Christians may fail - may miss opportunities - to bring the Kingdom about. So perhaps we could ask God to begin showing us ways that we as a parish or individuals can honestly - but shrewdly - use our cleverness, the blessings He has bestowed on us, and the privileges we enjoy to bring about blessing for the sake of others.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

¹⁴ Podcast: “Joy Comes In The Morning” <https://cewgreen.substack.com/p/joy-comes-in-the-mourning#details> 9/25/22.

¹⁵ This led to a sense for Westerners that wealth signifies morality and that wealthy people are better than poor people.

¹⁶ Matthew 10:16

¹⁷ As Jesus parlayed his privileges as son of God to benefit people through healings and miracles