**A Monopoly on Salvation**

Based on [Luke 16:1-15](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk16.1-15)

Preached on September 22, 2013

Pentecost 18

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Did you ever play the board game Monopoly. It was my favorite board game when I was a kid. Now I despise it. But if you're familiar with the game you know that when you are the one who ends up owning most of the property, Baltic Avenue, Marvin Gardens, and of course Park Place and Boardwalk...When you get the most monopolies with a hotel on...you get bookoo bucks. If you are the one who ends up with most of the property, and a player lands on your square and owes you but can't pay up, you win...and game over?

It's a good feeling to be in control in that game, to own all the property.

When I was a kid, if I owned the board, I didn't want the game to end. So if somebody owed me and couldn't pay, I reduced the debt, just to keep the game going. I'd look at how much money they had and lower the price**. If they landed on boardwalk and owed me $100, but only had $80 to their name...I wouldn't ask them for $100...why? Because then the game is over. Sure I win, but the games over, and I'm not a winner anymore.** If the game ends then so does the monopoly empire I had built. So I say, "Don't worry about the $100, just pay me $20. That way, I keep the game going, the game where I still have all my property, and I am the manager.

The Pharisees, in Jesus day, saw religion as a game of monopoly. They had a monopoly on God's teachings. They were supposed to teach the full council of God's law, that if you sin even in the slightest you are a sinner, and deserve hell. But instead, they would make new rules to replace God's law, easier rules that they claimed would keep you from being a sinner at all.

In the game of monopoly, God owns the board, his people owe him more than they can pay. **The Pharisees were supposed to be like John the Baptist who preached, "You owe god more than you can pay...repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins."** But the pharisees didn't do that. The Pharisees said, "you owe god $100...give him $20, then you won' t have to beg for mercy. Give him $20 and that's enough to pay off your debt." The pharisees say, "**You owe god one holy sabbath a week, but oh, you can't afford it**" Then the pharisees were supposed to say, "**Repent give up your ego and admit you can't do it, and seek forgiveness.**" But they wouldn't. Instead they'd say "you can keep the sabbath, just do x, y, and z". **They were supposed to say to the monopoly players of God's sheep, "Game over" god wins...repent**." Instead they say, "you can still win this thing, stay in the game, keep trying to pay off your own debt of sin." The pharisees know that their worldly livelihood depends on people staying in the game.

Ladies and gentlmen, that's what was so hypocritical about the pharisees, it's not that they demanded too much of God's people, it's that they didn't demand enough. They demanded tithes, they demanded morals, they demanded 10 step programs to a better "you." They demanded little observances like don't walk more than 1/2 mile on the Sabbath; don't get too close to an unclean person; wash your hands before every meal. Oh sure the list that the pharisees came up with was long and tedious...but the list was doable. And that's what the pharisees wanted, doable things that would keep people soo busy trying to save themselves, that the pharisees could living high on the hog because of it.

The pharisees demanded righteous actions, but God told them to demand something much more difficult...a repentant hearts. God only demands one thing, but it is infinitely more than the "honey-do" list of the pharisees, and of the discipleship programs that have replaced straight theology in the church today. Theology focuses on God, discipleship focuses on you...and you can't serve two masters.

All this to give us some perspective on a very difficult parable that Jesus tells today. Jesus tells the story of a manager who has signing authority over a rich man's account. The manager was accused of cooking the books, and so he was fired. The manager, being clever, knowing his goal is to secure his own livelihood on earth...knowing he's too lazy to do real work, and has too big of an ego to ask for charity. So, while the manager was still cleaning out his desk came up with a plan. "**I need to do something so that people will welcome me into their houses. I'm no longer manager, but other people don't know that. A lot of people owe my old boss money. I'll use his authority to forgive their debts**." And so, still in possession of his bosses ledger, he goes around reducing their debts. Not eliminating it, but reducing it so that he can make friends and influence people. And when the rich boss finds out what the manager did, he praises him for being so darn clever! What in the world...why would Jesus tell such a story?

God is the rich man, who had hired a manager...the pharisees, who were being accused of wasting his possessions (that is...God's Word). They were accused by John the Baptist, who called the Pharisees a brood of vipers because they don't seek repentance. And when John and Jesus came, the Pharisees know their time is up. Like an embezzler caught in the act, they know that they're gonna be fired...that the ministry of the Word and authority of God is going to be taken from them.

And since they are sons of the world, they're one concern is their livelihood here and now. And so, before word gets out that their religious authority has been stripped from them, what do they do? They do what worldly pastors and religious leaders do today, they pretend to speak for God and tell people who have not been catechized what their itching ears want to hear. They go around reducing debt saying, "**God wants' you to be happy, and healthy, and rich. He wants you to have a successful marriage and a perfect plastic family. Don't listen to those preacher of repentance, those debbie-downers who say that you're a sinner all the time and need to repent. You know the only real sin is negativity. Just show god a little faith by putting on a postive attitude, and giving money to the church, and pray like your rubbing the genie right out of the bottle and god will bless you for being so good and righteous and not like those sinners and tax collectors who give up so easily and turn to repentance.**

Pharisess then and now say, "**Sure you owe God more than you can pay, but don't worry, I have god's ledger right here, and I'll reduce your debt so that you can continue to strive to save yourself without having to go through that nasty humiliating business of repentance**." And you know what, ladies and gentlemen, it works. For preachers, whose only goal is to be accepted into people's homes, the most clever way to do it is to be a people-pleaser. That's how you keep the religious machine going; that's how you keep people in the game of monopoly, by giving them a false hope...that the next time they roll the dice, maybe they'll win the jackpot, pass go and collect $200.

And so in this parable, Jesus is tipping his hat to the Pharisees saying, "Oh, your good." In the parable, **the rich man whose ledger was compromised commends the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.** He praises how good he is at dishonesty. It's like when you watch Oceans 11 and they get away with robbing a casino. You'd never say, "**Oh, these are very godly men**", but you would say "**Dang, they are clever...they got away with it.**" Because they were so shrewd they got what they were after...money.

The Pharisees, have received their reward..earthly dwellings, money, the praise and approval of people whom they've pleased. They are lovers of money and in order to get it they justify themselves before men, they redefine righteousness and place it within your reach. They say, "**you can reach Jesus by buying following these steps,**" all the while shrouding the fact that it already is within your reach. You have Jesus when you reach out and take his body and blood, then you have attained righteousness, not of your own, but of Jesus.

The Pharisees of the world then and today teach that you can avoid sin by practicing certain steps. Even if they don't put it so crassly, that's what such teaching amounts to...any teaching that leads you to think that you can keep God's law even a little bit, by enrolling in some man-made program. They try and put righteousness within your reach, **shrouding the fact that it already is within your reach** when you receive him in body and blood.

You cannot become righteous by keeping gods law. Anyone who says that you can, any church or pastor or Christian author who reduces God's law to a program, just wants you to keep rolling the dice, and playing the game, **because they are already so invested in it themselves**. God says, "**You are bankrupt. Why do you keep playing this silly game? I own the board, and I have a monopoly on salvation, and unless you admit defeat, you can never receive the joy of my victory."**

And my victory is not in giving you your best, most comfortable and easy life now. My victory is in giving you the baptism, body, blood and Word of my Son. He is the shrewd manager who was not a son of this world, but the Son of light. He gave up his management in heaven to become man and manage from earth. From earth, he went around under my authority, not just reduce people's debt of sin, but forgive it all. He went from town to town, home to home, not so that he could fool people into receiving him, So people would receive him into their homes and be truly and totally forgiven.

"**My Son**," says God, "**he had no place to rest his head, for he was busy, holding on to my ledger and forgiving people's debt. But he's not like the sons of this world. The Pharisees forgive a fraction of the debts owed, but don't pay it themselves; they rob my Law. But my son, the light of the world, freely forgave, and then when I called to collect what I was owed he said, "Father, I will pay all they owe and more, take it from me on the cross. I will pay their debt, not with gold or silver, but with my holy precious innocent suffering and death on a cross." And on that cross the books were balanced, and the debt was paid."**

In the sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ, you faithful people of God can know that his blood didn't just "reduce" your debt of sin, **but paid it all off, *principal AND interest*, forever!** For it is, after all, Jesus who was faithful in little and in much. He was faithful to us in humility on earth; and he is faithful to us still in glory in heaven. And he now has been given a full monopoly on salvation. And so rejoice in this: **because of His faithfulness, he has prepared a place for us in your master's house.** Because Jesus paid your mortgage, you can rest assured that you will have a place to live with him in eternal dwellings.