

Did God Really Say ... ?

1 Timothy 2:1-15

There are quite a few details we aren't told in today's parable recorded in Luke. Jesus says: *There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions.* What if the charges were false, made up by someone who did not like the manager? But you assumed they were true, just like you assume other rumors are true when people share them with you.

True or not, the manager was going to get fired. He *said to himself, ... "I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses."* So, *summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, "How much do you owe my master?" He said, "A hundred measures of oil." He said to him, "Take your bill, and sit down and quickly write fifty."* Then he said to another, *"And how much do you owe?" He said, "A hundred measures of wheat."* He said to him, *"Take your bill, and write eighty."* You're doing it again. I can tell. You're assuming the manager is swindling his boss out of all that olive oil and wheat. But what if that amount is his commission, how he got paid, and he is giving it up, losing out in the short term, but with his eyes on a long term benefit? We don't know. We aren't told.

What we are told is about faithfulness and honesty: *"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and the one who is dishonest in very little is also dishonest with much. ... No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."*

Jesus speaks this truth very plainly. And what do the Pharisees think? ... They don't like it. They don't like it at all. They ridiculed

Jesus. They think what He said is ridiculous. They are ready to dismiss what Jesus says, and dismiss Jesus right along with it.

We are in danger of doing the very same. There are some things God says that we do not like, and there is a very real temptation to dismiss them. And if we dismiss God's word, are we not dismissing Him along with it?

Do you need an example? There are several in our reading from 1 Timothy. How about this one? "I desire that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands ..." We will move into the prayers of the church right after the Apostles' Creed. How many men here will lift up their hands? I'm usually the only one. It says "lifting holy hands". We believe the Bible is God's word, so why don't we lift up our hands?

How about this one: *"Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control ..."* I appreciate it when you do. When I am distributing the Lord's Supper, I do not need to be distracted by your cleavage. And the people in the pews behind you don't need to be distracted by what is showing from the back end. Respectable apparel, with modesty – that's what God says, whether some like it or not.

Maybe that one's not so difficult, but what about this one? *"Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet."* Do you want to hear the rest? Maybe not, but let's get it out there. *"For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control."*

What do we do with that? ... The simple thing is to dismiss it. ... And God along with His word? ... The other option is to be like Jacob.

He is about to meet his brother, Esau, from whom he had taken his birthright and his blessing. It had been about 15 years since Jacob had fled because Esau had vowed to kill him. Jacob has sent his servants, his flocks, his wives, and his children across the Jabbok River, the last barrier between him and his brother. In Genesis 32 we read, *And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered" (Vv. 24-30).*

Jacob didn't like what was before him, but he knew he couldn't dismiss it. He had to wrestle. We do as well. We can't just dismiss God's word because we don't like it. We must wrestle.

We do as a church body. Every three years we have a District Convention. A pastor and a lay person from each congregation attends. In my thirty years of ministry (which means 10 conventions) I can only remember one that did not include a discussion on the role of women in the church.

Some of us struggle with this word of God individually. That's not a bad thing. The bad thing is to dismiss it, to listen to the words of the serpent: "Did God really say?" We know where that led Adam and Eve. We know where that can lead us – to dismiss God's word, and in turn dismiss Him.

These aren't the only sections of Scripture we don't like. We don't like the Law in general. It's always pointing its demanding finger at us telling us what we should do and shouldn't do. Then it points its condemning finger at us because did what we weren't supposed to do, and left good things undone.

We struggle with our old sinful flesh. It is a constant wrestling match. And our record of wins versus losses is not good. That is why it is good that we begin each worship service with words of confession and absolution. We confess the sinful things we have done, and the good things we have left undone. Then we are absolved – forgiven – for all of them for the sake of Christ Jesus. We hear words of forgiveness from Jesus Himself, and the deliver what they promise. The resurrected Jesus did really say, "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven" (John 20:23).

Your sins are forgiven. Jesus struggled to live perfectly according to the word of God and succeeded. He did it for you. Jesus struggled under the weight of the sins of the world placed on Him so that He could die to pay for them. It seemed as though He had lost as He died there on that cross. But on Easter morning His tomb was empty. The grave could not hold Him. He rose from the dead and has freed you from the power of sin and death. He paid for you sin, and He has promised that you, too, will rise from the grave as He Himself calls you forth at His return.

Christ's victory is yours! But the struggle continues. The forgiveness of all your sin and the promise of life everlasting is yours! But we continue to wrestle. And that's not a bad thing. It means that you have not dismissed God's word. You acknowledge Him to be the Lord, and you want to understand and follow His word. And more good news? His Spirit lives in you to help you do just that. Amen.