

Invest In God's Mercy

Luke 16:1-15 He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. ² "So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'³ "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ 'I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'⁵ "So he called every one of his master's debtors to *him*, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'⁷ "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'⁸ "So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. ⁹ "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. ¹⁰ "He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much. ¹¹ "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*? ¹² "And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." ¹⁴ Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. ¹⁵ And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

In 1995 two young students Larry and Sergey began work programming a new search engine for the internet that we now know as google. Google didn't invent the internet, and they weren't the first search engine. Yahoo for example was already quite big at the time, but Google quickly surpassed Yahoo and many other search engines, why?

It is a fascinating history but the main point is that in many different ways the founders of google made better use of the internet and the data available on it. They didn't create it but they understood how to use it for greater potential.

The history of business and invention is full of similar stories. It is often not the initial inventor who truly profits, but rather the one who realized a things full potential. Sears understood how to make use of the US postal service to sell things but didn't make the same use of the internet. Amazon understood how to harness the internet better for sales.

In our sermon text Jesus is encouraging a similar shrewdness from us, that we are wise enough to understand how to make full use of those tools which are available to us. He would have us understand how to use our money and earthly treasures to gain heavenly treasure. Even more important He would have us understand how to make full use of His mercy.

Invest in God's Mercy.

Use money for heavenly purposes.

Jesus introduces the parable with the words "a certain rich man." This exact same phrase is used three other times, all three times in the gospel of Luke and all three times to introduce a parable.

The first is the parable of the rich fool who built barns and then died. The second is this parable of the unjust steward. Third is the parable of rich man and Lazarus. These three parables together might be seen as Jesus' catechism on money.

The first one teaches us the right attitude towards money. The third one, the rich man and Lazarus, teaches us what not to do with money. This second one reveals the proper use of money. Even though money can often lead to greed and evil Jesus teaches we don't need to throw it away. Instead we can exchange earthly wealth for heavenly.

Notice that this is the only one of the three which is spoken to the disciples. Rather than throw it away Jesus says use it but use it for the work of the kingdom. Use it to "make friends" that is to bring people to Christ.

Just like google, and sears, and amazon were shrewd in making better use of the tools available to them, so you also use what is available to you wisely, but not to make more money, but rather for the work of God's kingdom.

Pro 19:17 He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given.

We know the end is coming instead of investing in earthly wealth which will soon be useless, we ought to divest in earthly wealth and invest in heavenly riches.

We have a great new opportunity to do this. The CLC recently started a Christian education fund. You send your offerings to this fund and that money will be used to help support and start schools in congregations that need help. Of course, here you have for many years invested much in the Christian education. That investment will not be lost, the Lord promises to repay it

Luke 6:38 "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

Make wise use of your earthly treasures to gain heavenly treasures, use your money to invest in the kingdom of God. That is one lesson, and the simplest that Jesus wants us to learn from this parable. But there is obviously something else going on here. There are elements of this parable that just don't make sense and leave us confused. Why do the debtors go along with the scheme of the steward? Why does the steward think he is going to get away with this? And above all why does the master not only let the steward "get away" with this scheme but even praise him for it?

The key to understanding this parable is found in the name of our God, in the very character and nature of our Savior. Remember what the name of God is as He proclaimed it to Moses?

Exodus 34:6 The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,

The master in the parable is the Christ figure, and like the real Christ he is merciful and gracious. Not only is He merciful but He wants his people to know Him as merciful. The steward of the parable understands this truth and comes up with a plan which relies on the master's mercy.

The steward makes it appear to the debtors that the master has ordered the reduction of their bill. The master is going to get the credit for being merciful. The steward also makes the debtors change it "with their own hand," thus the master will know that they the debtors already know the changes have been made.

If the master reverses the changes in the bill the debtors will not see him as merciful, if he leaves it, they will. The master chooses to lose the oil rather than appear less gracious. This is what the steward was counting on.

This is what makes this parable so difficult for us to understand because no human master would ever do this. No human master would let the steward "get away" just to appear gracious. This 50 measures of oil is about 400 gallons. That would have been worth something like the equivalent of \$100,000 dollars in Jesus day.

Many of you work at banks. If you go in tomorrow and start subtracting \$100,000 from peoples' mortgages is the bank going to let that stand just so that they appear gracious? Are they going to praise you for doing it? No. This would not happen in real life. The Pharisees even laugh at Christ, because this parable is so absurd and so ridiculous. No human master would ever do this. But we like the steward know the character of our Lord and are not surprised that He acts this way.

What God desires above all else is for us to know His mercy.

In the wilderness God wanted to show the people mercy. He told Moses to speak to the rock. Moses hit the rock instead. God condemned Moses to never enter the promised land, because Moses portrayed God's as angry when God wanted the people to see his mercy.

Paul tells us that God gave us the law to lead us to Christ. God gave us the law not so that we could fulfill it and live but so that we would know how sinful we are and would therefore know just how gracious and forgiving He is.

Christ died openly on a cross where all could see the punishment from sin and know just how gracious our God is.

Our Lord is merciful and gracious and He wants us to know it and trust it.

This isn't really a parable about money at all. It is a parable about Christ's mercy. At the start of the parable the steward only cared about money. He was even stealing from his master. Then he realizes he can't count on his master's money anymore, so he stakes his whole life on his master's mercy.

No wonder Jesus praises this man. This is what our God wants above everything else. That we trust in His mercy. That we know His forgiveness. That we stake everything on His grace.

Jesus would teach us to invest our money in His kingdom, but even better He would have us invest in His gracious promises. He wants us to make full use of His promises. We can invest our money in the Christian education fund, in a new boiler, in missions etc. That is good. But what we need even more is to invest God's promises. To go forward with these projects knowing God has promised to be with us

Joshua 1:9⁹ "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

An experienced warrior with a bow is more deadly than an inexperienced man with a gun.

This is what Jesus was talking about in our text when He said, **"For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light."** Luke 16:8

They are often more shrewd in the use of earthly tools than we are in the use of the heavenly tools God has given to us. Our weapons are far greater than what the world has, the word of God, the sacraments, the power of prayer, and the promises of God. Nothing the world has can stand against these powers, this is why Jesus says "you can move mountains." But only if we use them. In this parable God wants us to be wise and shrewd with the weapons He has given us, to make full use of them

Larry and Sergey were wise enough to use of the data to a greater and better extent than anyone had before. The people of this world are very wise in making use of money and other things. God has given us something greater, make full use of His promises. Use your money and earthly treasures to invest in heaven, but more importantly make full use of God's mercy. Bet everything you have on the fact that God will be merciful, and you will not lose.