

## INVESTING IN HEAVEN

### 1 Timothy 6:3-10

<sup>3</sup> If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, <sup>4</sup> they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions <sup>5</sup> and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

<sup>6</sup> But godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. <sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. <sup>9</sup> Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

### Luke 16:1-13 The Parable of the Shrewd Manager

16 Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. <sup>2</sup> 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.’

<sup>3</sup> “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— <sup>4</sup> I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’

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

<sup>6</sup> “‘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.’

<sup>7</sup> “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.’

<sup>8</sup> “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. <sup>9</sup> I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

<sup>10</sup> “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. <sup>11</sup> So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? <sup>12</sup> 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.”

### Message:

THE TITLE OF TODAY’S MESSAGE IS “INVESTING IN HEAVEN.” IT’S NOT ABOUT BUYING REAL ESTATE IN HEAVEN. IN THAT CASE THE TITLE WOULD HAVE BEEN, “LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION.”

WHAT IT IS ABOUT IS A HEAVENLY OPTION YOU HAVE FOR INVESTING YOUR MONEY—AN OPTION WHICH IS SET FORTH IN TODAY'S GOSPEL LESSON. IT COMES IN THE FORM OF A PARABLE—THE STORY OF A MAN WHO HAS BEEN HIRED TO MANAGE A BUSINESS BUT WHO IS FIRED FOR INCOMPETENCE. BUT BEFORE HE CLEANS OUT HIS DESK AND LEAVES, HE USES SOME OF THE OWNER'S ASSETS TO FEATHER HIS OWN NEST. HE TURNS FROM AN INCOMPETENT EMPLOYEE INTO AN EMBEZZLER. AT FIRST GLANCE THE STORY IS A LITTLE PUZZLING BECAUSE IT ALMOST SEEMS AS IF JESUS IS APPROVING OF DISHONESTY. BUT THAT'S NOT THE CASE AS WE WILL SEE.

THE ACCOUNT OF THE DISHONEST MANAGER IS THE FINAL STORY IN A SERIES OF PARABLES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO LOSE SOMETHING VALUABLE & THEN FIND IT AGAIN. A SHEPHERD WHO FINDS A LOST SHEEP; A WOMAN WHO FINDS A LOST COIN; A FATHER WHO REGAINS A SON HE THOUGHT HE HAD LOST FOREVER; AND A MAN WHO LOSES HIS LIVELIHOOD AND THEN SEEKS A NEW WAY TO MAKE A LIVING.

AS THE STORY OPENS THE MAN IS BEING FIRED BY THE OWNER OF THE BUSINESS FOR SQUANDERING HIS POSSESSIONS. *"WHAT IS THIS I HEAR ABOUT YOU?... YOU CANNOT BE MANAGER ANY LONGER."* SO WHAT DOES THE MANAGER DO? FILE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION? THERE WASN'T ANY IN THOSE DAYS. HIRE A LAWYER AND SUE THE OWNER FOR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST INCOMPETENT EMPLOYEES? CLASS ACTION LAWSUITS HADN'T BEEN INVENTED YET. GO ON WELFARE? IN THOSE DAYS IT WAS WORK OR BEG AND HE DOESN'T LIKE THE IDEA OF EITHER ONE. *"I'M ASHAMED TO BEG AND I'M NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO DIG."* THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT HE IS ON HIS OWN, OUT IN THE COLD AND UP THE CREEK.

THEN HE COMES UP WITH A SCHEME TO SAVE HIS BACON. *"I KNOW WHAT I'LL DO!"* AND SO BEFORE HE CLEANS OUT HIS DESK HE CONTACTS TWO OF THE COMPANY'S MAJOR CUSTOMERS AND OFFERS THEM HUGE DISCOUNTS ON WHAT THEY OWE THE OWNER. BY DOING THIS HE HOPES TO WIN THEIR GRATITUDE SO THAT WHEN HE'S OUT ON THE STREET, THEY'LL BE INCLINED TO FIND A PLACE FOR HIM IN THEIR EMPLOY. SO HE REDUCES THE FIRST MAN'S DEBT BY 400 GALLONS OF OIL AND THE SECOND MAN'S DEBT BY 200 BUSHEL OF WHEAT. IN TODAY'S TERMS, THIS AMOUNTS TO APPROXIMATELY A \$25,000 DISCOUNT ON WHAT THEY OWED.

SUCH A DEAL! OF COURSE THEY GLADLY ACCEPT. THEN COMES THE BIG SURPRISE: WHEN THE OWNER FINDS OUT WHAT THE MANAGER HAS DONE, INSTEAD OF CURSING HIM, HE COMPLIMENTS HIM ON HIS SHREWDNESS! WHY?

WELL, FIRST OF ALL, HE ADMIRES HIS CHUTZPA. THE MANAGER HAS INGRATIATED HIMSELF WITH INFLUENTIAL FRIENDS WHO ARE IN A POSITION TO HELP HIM. FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD! SECOND, HE ADMIRES HIS CLEVERNESS. THE OWNER CAN'T VERY WELL RENEG ON THE DISCOUNTS WITHOUT ANGERING TWO IMPORTANT CUSTOMERS. THE MANAGER HAS

COME UP WITH A CLEVER PLAN AND WHETHER OR NOT THE OWNER LIKES IT, HE RESPECTS HIM FOR HAVING COME UP WITH IT BECAUSE SHREWDNESS IS HONORED IN THE KINGDOM OF THIS WORLD. BY USING HIS MASTER'S RICHES TO PROVIDE FOR HIS OWN FUTURE, HE HAS WON THE MASTER'S RESPECT.

NOW COMES THE TRICKY PART. IS JESUS HOLDING UP DISHONEST BEHAVIOR AS A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR CHRISTIANS? NO.

JESUS DOESN'T COMMEND THE DISHONEST MANAGER. HE SIMPLY TAKES NOTE OF HOW HE WAS RESOURCEFUL IN USING HIS MASTER'S RICHES TO PROVIDE FOR HIS FUTURE LIFE, AND SUGGESTS THAT CHRISTIANS WOULD DO WELL TO DO USE THEIR MASTER'S RICHES TO PROVIDE FOR THEIR OWN FUTURE LIFE. *"FOR THE PEOPLE OF THIS WORLD ARE MORE SHREWD IN DEALING WITH THEIR OWN KIND THAN ARE THE PEOPLE OF THE LIGHT."*

NOW THE MANAGER'S MASTER WAS A BUSINESS OWNER AND HIS POSSESSIONS CONSISTED OF HIS INVENTORY WHICH INCLUDED OIL AND GRAIN. BUT THE CHRISTIAN'S MASTER IS GOD AND HIS POSSESSIONS INCLUDE ALL OF CREATION. THE OWNER PUT HIS COMPANY IN THE HANDS OF THE MANAGER AND TRUSTED HIM TO TAKE GOOD CARE OF IT. GOD HAS PUT HIS CREATION IN OUR HANDS AND TRUSTS US TO TAKE GOOD CARE OF IT.

FIRST OF ALL, OF COURSE, THIS MEANS TAKING PROPER CARE OF THE EARTH ITSELF. AS ADAM WAS PUT IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN TO WORK IT AND TAKE CARE OF GOD'S OTHER CREATURES, SO ARE WE PLACED ON THIS EARTH TO WORK IT AND TAKE CARE OF GOD'S OTHER CREATURES. GOD HAS MADE US STEWARDS OF CREATION. WE CAN BE GOOD STEWARDS OR WE CAN BE POOR STEWARDS. WE CAN USE CREATION WISELY OR FOOLISHLY, PRODUCTIVELY OR WASTEFULLY, FAITHFULLY OR UNFAITHFULLY. BUT GOD'S CREATION INCLUDES MORE THAN WHAT WE LIKE TO CALL "NATURE": IT ALSO INCLUDES OUR FRIENDS, OUR JOBS, OUR FAMILIES AND ALL OUR POSSESSIONS. WHAT WE MIGHT CALL OUR RICHES.

ALL OUR RICHES COME FROM GOD AND HE HAS ENTRUSTED THEM TO OUR STEWARDSHIP. THE MANAGER HAD THE OWNER'S RICHES TO INVEST. WE HAVE GOD'S RICHES TO INVEST. JESUS SUGGESTS THAT THE BEST WAY WE CAN INVEST GOD'S RICHES IS TO USE THEM TO MAKE FRIENDS FOR OURSELVES. NOT JUST ANY FRIENDS, BUT FRIENDS WHO WILL WELCOME US INTO THE ETERNAL HABITATIONS—IN OTHER WORDS, INTO HEAVEN. BUT HOW DO WE DO THAT?

I THINK THE ANSWER LIES IN THE PARABLE THAT JESUS TELLS NEXT—A STORY ABOUT RICH MAN WHO WAS A VERY POOR STEWARD OF THE RICHES GOD HAD ENTRUSTED TO HIM, AND A BEGGAR BY THE NAME OF LAZARUS. THE RICH MAN IS SO SELF-CENTERED AND ABSORBED WITH HIS MANY POSSESSIONS THAT HE LITERALLY STEPS OVER THE SICK BEGGAR AT HIS DOORSTEP WITHOUT NOTICING HIM—LET ALONE SUFFERING ANY PANGS OF CONSCIENCE. HE JUST DOESN'T SEE THAT LAZARUS IS THERE!

Powell recalled for us a time as a younger man, when he worked at University Hospitals. His entire drive from Chagrin Falls to work was through the beautiful East side neighborhoods, of Moreland Hills, Woodmere, Beachwood, Shaker Heights, and down to University Circle. He commented how easy it was to overlook the human suffering that existed outside the small world he saw on his daily drive back and forth to work.

LATER, THOUGH, WHEN THE RICH MAN IS SUFFERING IN HELL, ABRAHAM REMINDS HIM: *“YOU HAD YOUR GOOD THINGS WHILE LAZARUS HAD EVIL.”* THINGS COULD HAVE GONE DIFFERENTLY. THE RICH MAN COULD HAVE INVESTED SOME OF HIS MONEY IN ALLEVIATING LAZARUS’ SUFFERING INSTEAD OF ENHANCING HIS PORTFOLIO. IN SO DOING, HE WOULD HAVE MADE A FRIEND WHO WOULD HAVE WELCOMED HIM INTO HEAVEN WHEN HIS LIFE ENDED. OF COURSE THAT WOULD HAVE REQUIRED FAITH, WHICH THE RICH MAN APPARENTLY DIDN’T HAVE.

WE CAN’T BUY OUR WAY INTO HEAVEN, BUT WE CAN USE OUR WORLDLY RICHES—INCLUDING OUR TIME AND OUR MONEY—TO BUILD GOD’S KINGDOM IN THIS WORLD. WE CAN USE THEM TO DRAW PEOPLE TO THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT OR WE CAN USE THEM TO SHINE LIGHT ON OURSELVES. THE ONE IS WISE; THE OTHER IS FOOLISH.

TRUTH BE KNOWN, WE HAVE ALL BEEN CAUGHT WASTING OUR MASTER’S GOODS, HAVEN’T WE? THE VOICE THAT CONFRONTED THE WASTEFUL MANAGER ALSO CONFRONTS US: *“WHAT IS THIS I HEAR ABOUT YOU? HAVE YOU BEEN WASTING MY POSSESSIONS?”* LIKE THE SHREWD MANAGER, EACH ONE OF US HAS BEEN GIVEN A BRIEF MOMENT OF GRACE UNTIL JESUS, OUR HEAVENLY MASTER, RETURNS TO CARRY OUT HIS FINAL JUDGEMENT. AT THAT MOMENT IT WILL BE MADE CLEAR TO EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US HOW WELL—OR HOW POORLY—WE HAVE USED OUR MASTER’S POSSESSIONS.

AT THE CHURCH I SERVED BEFORE COMING TO HOPE, WE SUPPORTED A MEDICAL MISSIONARY WHOSE NAME WAS DR. LAUTENSCHLAGER. AFTER SPENDING TWENTY YEARS IN AFRICA, DR. LAUTENSCHLAGER RETURNED TO AMERICA AND VISITED OUR CHURCH. HE DESCRIBED IN DETAIL WHAT LIFE HAD BEEN LIKE IN AFRICA FOR HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY. HE CONSTANTLY LACKED MEDICAL SUPPLIES, IT WAS HARD TO FIND GOOD, NOURISHING FOOD, HE COULDN’T GET THE MEDICINES HE NEEDED TO TREAT HIS PATIENTS, AND HE HAD TO SEND HIS CHILDREN ALMOST TWO HUNDRED MILES AWAY TO A SCHOOL THAT WAS SAFE. STILL, I DON’T THINK I’VE EVER SEEN A HAPPIER MAN—OR FAMILY.

FAR FROM COMPLAINING ABOUT AFRICA, HE SPOKE AFFECTIONATELY ABOUT THE TIME HE AND HIS FAMILY HAD SPENT THERE. WHEN THE TIME CAME FOR DR. LAUTENSCHLAGER TO LEAVE, HE PACKED UP HIS FAMILY AND EVERYTHING THEY OWNED IN A CHEVY STATION WAGON. AS HE STOOD LOOKING AT IT IN THE PARKING LOT BEHIND OUR CHURCH HE SAID, *“ISN’T IT AMAZING HOW*

*MUCH STUFF YOU ACCUMULATE OVER THE YEARS?" ALL THE "STUFF" HE HAD ACCUMULATED OVER THE YEARS FIT INTO ONE CAR.*

HE AND HIS FAMILY HAD INVESTED ALL THEIR RICHES IN KINGDOM WORK. I CAN'T IMAGINE HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL WELCOME THEM INTO HEAVEN WHEN THEY ARRIVE. SINCE HE WAS TRUSTWORTHY IN HANDLING SMALL AMOUNTS OF WORLDLY WEALTH, IMAGINE THE TRUE RICHES THAT WILL BE ENTRUSTED TO HIM IN HEAVEN?

IN THE MOMENT OF GRACE IN WHICH YOU AND I NOW LIVE, HOW CAN WE USE WORLDLY WEALTH FOR KINGDOM PURPOSES? THIS IS WHAT STEWARDSHIP—THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR RESOURCES—IS ALL ABOUT. THIS IS WHAT DISCOVERING JOY IN GIVING IS ALL ABOUT. HOW MANY FRIENDS MIGHT GREET YOU ON THE LAST DAY IF YOU INVESTED YOUR MONEY IN ENABLING THE GOSPEL TO BE PREACHED AROUND THE WORLD? HOW MANY MIGHT WELCOME YOU INTO HEAVEN LATER IF YOU TOLD THEM ABOUT THE NEW LIFE THEY COULD HAVE IN JESUS CHRIST RIGHT NOW? WHAT HARVEST WOULD YOU REAP IF YOU INVESTED YOUR MONEY IN SUPPORTING THE WORK OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES AROUND THE WORLD?

ALL THESE INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES AWAIT YOUR CONSIDERATION. THERE ARE NO PROSPECTUSES OR ANNUAL REPORTS OR ATTRACTIVE BROCHURES TO EXCITE YOUR INTEREST. BUT THERE'S NO RISK OF LOSING YOUR MONEY EITHER.

THE LOVE AND WORSHIP OF MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL.<sup>rr</sup>

AND JESUS MADE IT CLEAR THAT WE CANNOT LOVE BOTH MONEY AND GOD.

GOD SOUGHT US OUT, FOUND US, SAVED US AND FREED US FROM WORLDLY IDOLS SO THAT WE WOULD USE MATERIAL THINGS—INCLUDING MONEY—FOR KINGDOM PURPOSES. IT'S A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY! AMEN.