

Read Luke Chapter 16 v1-15

How would the parable sound today?

There was once a Rich Man from the wrong end of the tracks, who built up a successful business in IT Recruitment – we'll call him 'The Boss'. He was ruthlessness in business, and street wise – and not particularly close to the law. Flattered his clients, and drove his workers hard. Ultimately, 'The Boss' relied on his Operations Manager (the steward) to run a tight operation for him. Anyway, some of his cronies did a bit of back-stabbing, and said the Operations Manager was squandering the hard-won profits.

The Boss was infuriated, and he called him in, asked him to 'fess-up'; 'what have you been up to'. You're on your way fella – 2 weeks' notice and you're history.

The manager felt his stomach turn to water – he had a family and kids to look after. His strength was as a manager; he couldn't do IT, wasn't strong enough to labour on a building site, and he had frightening thoughts of being on the streets and selling the Big Issue.

So, he got on the phone to some of the clients, and gave out substantial discounts, much to the clients delight. He thought that this would put him in a good position to perhaps get work with some of these businesses after his last day. Who cares what the boss thinks, I'll be gone before he finds out!

Once again, through a bit of whispering, the Boss gets wind of what his manager was up to, and the Boss chuckled to himself. It was the kind of thing he might have done; his manager was street wise like himself and not averse to a bit of sharp practice.

We don't know what ultimately happened to the manager. Personally, I think that if our modern story were true there might be a bit of rough justice coming the manager's way, even if the boss admired his temerity.

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Now then, dear brothers and sisters. Let's deal with the elephant in the room. In the parable in Luke, the Rich Man commends the Manager for his shrewdness. In my modern interpretation the Boss chuckles at the manager's sharp practice. Does all this mean that Jesus' is commending? sharp practice?

Obviously not my friends. One guide for interpreting scripture that we must all adhere to using all of scripture to interpret scripture to help us understand those bits that are puzzling. If Jesus really did commend a bit of sharp practice, then the book of Acts might be very different. When Paul was travelling around Asia Minor, we might have a discourse on 'How to Succeed in Business – The Ephesus Method'.

But that obviously isn't the case. We don't have to look far to see what the bible says about sharp practice:

Proverbs 11:1 – A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight.

Proverbs 20:17 – Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel.

There is no dishonesty in the Lord our God. All his ways are just. He is Righteous; He is Holy; He is Good!

So, what is Jesus' saying to us in this parable?

Let's together consider two kingdoms. The first kingdom is the one we see and live in, as reported by the BBC, underpinned by social media – a kingdom that bombards us 24 hours a day of what to think, how to act, how to be. Let's call it Babylon.

Let's call the second Kingdom, the kingdom that God is building, the kingdom we read about in the bible, where God is preparing a people to Glorify and Enjoy Him forever. Let's call it the New Jerusalem.

In verse-8, Jesus says that the sons of this world (who I am calling the people of Babylon), are shrewder in dealing with their own generation than the sons of Light. Which, to put it another way, means that ...

those who are adapt at living in Babylonians know how to prosper – they know which trends to follow, what morality is in-vogue, how to say the right things. They know where to put their money, they know what to invest in; the 'right ideas', the way to get ahead.

Jesus compares this with those who are part of God's Kingdom (the new Jerusalem), those whom Jesus has called to follow him, to Glorify and enjoy him forever – God's people aren't always particularly shrewd. They don't take seriously the things that need to be invested in to obtain the true riches on offer, riches that won't fail. Riches that will change hearts to love and enjoy and glorify God, riches that enable us to love our wives, our children, our parents, our work colleagues in ways that glorify God. Riches that destroy the selfishness of our fallen being.

So how are we to be shrewd. Friends, we need to invest using 'eternal currency'. Eternal investment is that which brings a return with 100% interest, its an investment that enables us to Glorify God by enjoying him forever. It's an investment that displays God's glory in our greatest happiness. Our greatest happiness, true riches.

So how do we invest in this plan? It isn't complicated; let's look at the Investment Portfolio to identify those lucrative areas for investment.

Guide to Investment: (v9). *Make friends for yourselves my means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.* What does that mean? It simply means using our money wisely to free us up to invest in the things of God, to free time to pray and worship and read this God Breathed Word and acknowledge God to be the only true God, to worship and glorify him by thinking, meditating, remembering, esteeming, honouring, adoring, choosing, loving, desiring, fearing, believing, trusting, hoping, delighting and rejoicing in Him. These are the areas where we are to invest in God's kingdom.

And this is for an eternal inheritance friends, an eternal return on our investment, because the world around us, Babylon and the world according to the media, will all pass away like chaff in the wind. It's going to fail. Don't fail with it! So, brothers and sisters, be faithful in little things (v10), be faithful to God in the use of your money. No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Babylon.

How to apply this to our lives. Let's audit our investments – How much time do you invest in the things of God, when compared to the things of Babylon?

-Call to repentance and acceptance of our Lord as Saviour / Final Prayers