

What comes to your mind when you hear the name Bernie Madoff? Do you not think of a man who cheated investors and made off with billions of dollars, not millions but billions? Today he is in prison fulfilling a sentence of 221 years. He was a thief, a criminal, a crook but he sure was good at what he did.

So it was with the man in this story that Jesus tells. He sure was good at cheating and being a crook. When the time came for him to lose his job because of mismanagement, he cheats his boss by reducing the amount of oil and wheat people owe so they will welcome him into their homes when he is out on the street. Jesus teaches us a good lesson about investing in his kingdom from this bad example of cheating and stealing. He wants us to use our brains, our intelligence, our efforts to invest in something that will last forever, not the treasures of this life but the treasures of the kingdom of God.

Let's take a closer look at this story that Jesus tells. "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions." Does this ever happen in real life? It sure does. People are called on the carpet because they are doing a poor job of managing the business. The company stock goes down. They fire the top executive with the hope that a new person will turn the company around.

The rich man calls in his servant who was managing his business. "What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer." Now it's panic time. The lousy manager knows he cannot plead his case. There will be no golden parachute for him. Did you hear about Cloud Peak Coal company in Wyoming. They filed for bankruptcy and gave their executives 18.5 million dollars to guide the company thru the bankruptcy process. Imagine that, the execs took the company into bankruptcy and they come out smiling while the shareholders get nothing. But the Executive in our lesson got no golden parachute.

So this lousy manager begins to mull over in his mind what he can do to survive when he loses his job. He knows he is not strong enough to dig. Just look at his hands. Do you see calluses on his hands? Do you see strong muscles in his arms? This man is a pencil pusher. And he does not want to go out on the streets and beg for money. He is too proud to do that.

So he uses his brains to develop a scheme or plan that will provide for himself after his job ends. "I know what I'll do so that when I lose my job here people will welcome me in their homes." He calls in people who were in debt to the rich master. He tells one person who owes 800 gallons of olive oil to quickly change the amount to 400 gallons. He tells another person who owes a 1000 bushels of wheat to sit down and write 800. Thieves and cheats and dishonest people are sure good at using their brains to provides treasures for themselves.

I recall a man named Gordon Hillberg telling the story of how thieves were able to steal a large safe from an office building in Los Angeles. The heavy safe had been built so tightly into the wall and cabinets that it could not be removed unless you tore out part of the building. What did the thieves do? They put bb's, the kind you use in a bb gun, under the safe and were able to roll it out and haul it away. The people who are dishonest are sure good at using their brains to get what they want out of life.

The stories that Jesus tells are always full of surprises. This one is no different. "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly." Really? If that were me that last thing I would do is compliment this fellow on his creativity and ingenuity. I would

have some very harsh words to say about him. The last thing I would do is compliment him for being resourceful. Jesus purposely shows us this weird behavior on the part of the master to help us see the importance of using our brains to develop ways to invest in the treasures of his kingdom.

Notice how Jesus applies this to our lives. “For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.” The people of this world are smart in their behavior. Some use their intelligence to take advantage of other people in business dealings. A man from Santa Barbara a few years back was caught stealing millions of dollars from Tim Duncan the pro basketball player from the San Antonio Spurs. Others use their intelligence to design new products. Think of what Steve Jobs did with the Apple computer or Bill Gates did with Microsoft. Think of what our scientists did when we sent a man to the moon. You can still hear the words, “One small step for man and one giant leap for mankind.”

These words of Jesus really hit me hard this past week and perhaps the same is true also of you as you think about them. He says the people of this world are wiser than the children of light. I am thankful I do not use my brains to find ways to steal and cheat people. I am thankful I can use my mind to figure out problems whether it is a problem with my computer, or car or the leaky sprinkler pipe. But why do these words of Jesus hit me hard this morning? I am concerned that I have not always used my mind to the best of my ability to bring treasures into the kingdom of God. Oh what a blessing it is to have Jesus’ blood to wipe us clean of our failings to make the most of the opportunities he gives us to invest in his kingdom.

So we now go deeper to apply what Jesus says to our lives this morning. He says, “I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal dwellings.” That bad manager made friends for himself by dishonestly reducing the amount of olive oil and wheat they owed the rich man. His plan was to develop friendships with people who would welcome him into their homes when he was out of a job. Jesus tells us to use our wealth to make friends of people who will welcome us into the eternal dwellings.

Jesus is not telling us to use our worldly wealth to help other people so we can be rewarded with eternal life in heaven. Spending your money to help the poor will not eradicate one single sin from your past life. Only Jesus’ death and resurrection and perfect life can expunge every sin from your account. Several years ago Warren Buffet joined together with Bill Gates to donate large sums of money to help people who are suffering in this world. When asked about his generosity he said, “There is more than one way to get to heaven, but this is a great way.” And then there was the aging Hollywood star Zsa Gabor who was asked why she was generous with her friends. She said in a condescending tone of voice, “Of course you know that the more rent you pay here now, the bigger mansion you will have in heaven.”

You have heard people say, “You can’t take it with you.” Two elderly ladies were attending the funeral of a wealthy friend who had died. One lady whispered to her friend, “I wonder how much she left behind.” The friend whispered back, “I think she left it all behind.” There is nothing you can take with you when you die except for the people who will someday join you in the place Jesus has prepared for you. If I teach my children about Jesus and they put their trust in him for their forgiveness and peace with God, I will someday be able to see them again in the place Jesus has prepared for us. Dear Christians, you have the blessing of taking

your friends who are Christians with you after you die.

But it isn't just our Christian friends or family members that we take with us after we die. It is all the people all over the world who come to faith in Christ Jesus our Savior. They will be with us as it says in the Revelation, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."

When Jesus told this story of the shrewd and dishonesty manager it came immediately after the three stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. He told this to those who criticized him for sitting down and eating with sinners. Jesus wanted them to know that his purpose was to seek and save the lost. Immediately after telling these stories about seeking the lost, he turned to his disciples and told them this parable. He wanted them to see how important it was to devote themselves and everything they had to bringing into his kingdom those who are lost. When we invest in reaching people who are lost, we build up something that will last forever. We have people who will be with us someday in heaven.

The story is told of a pastor of a large church in the early years of the Christian church. Some enemies of the church captured him and demanded that he show them the treasures of the church so they could steal from the church. He told them, "Tomorrow I will show you the treasures of the church." The next day he gathered together the members of his congregation, many of them poor and outcast and they filled the church. Then he opened the doors and said to his enemies, "These are the treasures of the church."

Marvin Schwan is a name you might recognize – owner of Schwan's ice cream, Schwan's fine foods. Those yellow armored trucks with food in the back. Marvin Schwan has since passed away. He was a Lutheran, and he gave literally millions of dollars to our church body. Why? Not because he was pressured. And not because he was trying to earn his way to heaven. He wanted to worship Christ, show his love for Jesus, and so he used his worldly wealth to gain eternal friends.

Jesus encourages us to do the same. It doesn't matter how much you have. What matters is how you use it. What can I do with my money, during this short time I am on this earth, to gain eternal friends? Why can I do, to help someone else find out about the greatest donation ever made? May God bless you, as you look for ways to use your worldly wealth to gain eternal friends. Amen.