

The Twenty-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

(Year C)

<i>First Reading</i>	Amos 8:4-7
<i>Response</i>	Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Timothy 2:1-8
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Though our Lord Jesus Christ was rich, he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 16:1-13

The 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time for Year C continues our journey through the Gospel of Luke with a particular focus on the parables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. And in recent weeks, you probably noticed that a number of these sayings of Jesus—a number of these parables—are difficult. They’re not easy to understand at first glance, and nowhere is that clearer actually than in the parable that we’re going to look at today, which is called the parable of the dishonest steward. You might call it the parable of the prodigal steward because he’s wasting all of his master's money. This is widely regarded as the most confusing and difficult parable of all of the parables of Jesus. Since ancient times, in fact, St. Jerome, a friend of his, had to write a letter to him saying, “Could you please explain the parable of the dishonest steward?” And Augustine had to make sure in one of his sermons that people didn’t take this parable literally as an excuse for stealing money.

All the way up until recent times, scholars today—a number of scholars today—will basically come to the conclusion that this parable defies any satisfactory explanation. They just don't know exactly what to do with the Gospel for today. So all of you preachers out there, if you're preparing for this Sunday's homily and you're wondering, “What do I make of this text for today?” Don't worry, you're not alone; it is a complicated passage. I’m going to do my best to give you an explanation that makes sense of the passage as we have it. I’ll draw on the living tradition of the Church and also on some first century realities. So let's begin by looking at Luke 16:1-13. It’s a long Gospel, but we’ll read it and then we’ll unpack it:

[Jesus] said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a steward, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be called steward.’ And the steward said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that people may receive me into their houses when I am put out of the stewardship.’ 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.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and 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.’ The master commended the dishonest steward for his prudence; for the sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations.”

Now, many scholars actually think the parable proper ends right there, but the Gospel reading for today keeps going, because the theme of mammon and money and wealth continues. So let’s just keep going with the next few verses:

“He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? No servant 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 mammon.”¹

Okay, you can already see that this is a long and complex parable, and there's a lot going on here. I'd say the primary question most people have about this parable is:

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

“What does Jesus mean when he says ‘make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous mammon [or unrighteous money or stolen money], so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations’?”

What? What is that talking about? And why does the master commend the steward for, you know, his unjust activities? What's going on here? Well, the first clue to understanding this parable is one that I've made a point of emphasizing over and over again in these videos. Namely, that when you're listening to a parable of Jesus, if you just think of it as a nice kind of illustration from daily life that helps give you an insight into the kingdom—it's real simple and straightforward—then this parable doesn't make any sense. But if you remember that I told you before, many of Jesus' parables—most of them—have a twist. In other words, there's some unexpected element that isn't in fact commensurate with or analogous to daily ordinary life, and that the twist is usually the key to unlocking the meaning...then you can apply that principle to this parable, and it actually will go a long way toward explaining it. So let's walk through it together.

The first point to highlight here is the two characters in the parable. One is a rich man, a *plousios*—means a very wealthy man—and the other character is the steward. And the Greek word for steward here is *oikonomos*. We get the word “economy” in English from *oikonomos*. An *oikos* is a house in Greek, *nomos* is law, so the *oikonomos* is the one who runs the law of the household—meaning in this case, the monetary law of the household, the economic law of the household. In other words, he is the overseer of the master's fiscal matters, his financial matters, his estate. To this day, many many really wealthy people don't manage their own money. They hire someone else to manage their money, and the same thing was true in the first century A.D. If you were extremely wealthy, you would have an *oikonomos*, a steward, take care of your finances.

So in this case, there is a rich man, he finds out that his steward is wasting his money or wasting his goods. Now, it's interesting here, the Greek word for wasting, *diaskorpizō*, is the same word used of the prodigal son in Luke 15, who went off and wasted his father's property. In fact, that's the word that gets translated as “prodigal” in many of the older translations, so that's why—following Fr. Anthony Giambrone, he's a Catholic Dominican biblical scholar—he calls this the parable of the prodigal steward, because just like you had a prodigal son, here you

have a prodigal steward, who's wasting not his father's money, but his master's money. That kind of sets the terms for the story in the parable. So when the master comes in and he hears about what the steward is doing, he says, "What's this I hear of you? Turn in the account of your stewardship because you can no longer be steward." So his stewardship, literally his *oikonomia*, "turn in the account of your economy," because you're out. Basically, you're fired, or if you're in Great Britain, you're sacked, right? So you get sacked. And the steward said to himself, "What am I going to do? I'm too weak to dig, and I'm too proud to beg" is his basic response. In other words, "I've lived a life of luxury, so I'm too weak to go and be a day laborer," which is what many people would do. They go and just work for the day digging ditches or farming. He said, "I can't do that, I'm not physically able...and I'm too proud to go out and be among the poor or the destitute," those who just beg for a living. "So I know what I'm going to do" — this is really important to understand this — what he's going to do is, he summons all of his master's debtors, and he pays off their debts by stealing from his master — by cooking the books, basically.

So he says, "Well, how much?" to the first guy, "How much do you owe my master?" "Well, 100 measures of oil." So again, think about in ancient economy where a lot of the dealing isn't in cash but it's in product, right? So he says, "You owe a hundred measures of oil? Take your bill, sit down, and write 50." So what did the steward just do? He just basically stole 50 measures of oil from his master, and at the same time paid off the debt of the person and ingratiates himself to the debtor by taking money from his master. Next thing, he calls in another person, "How much do you owe?" "Well, 100 measures of wheat." "Okay, sit down, take your bill and write out eighty." So again, he's messing with the books, he's stealing from his master, and he's making friends in the process. So what is the steward doing? He's basically stealing; he's committing theft. He's breaking one of the Commandments, "you shall not steal," and he's paying down their debts with his master's money.

Now remember here that the Master's money — the word for Master in Greek is *kyrios* — so he's stealing from the lord, it's the same word for lord. And so what happens is the lord (in verse 8) or the master — this is where the twist is — instead of calling him in and saying, "You're going to debtors' prison" or "I'm going to have you flogged" or "I'm going to have you executed," which any one of those could

be a possibility for a very wealthy influential man. Here's the twist in the story: the master calls the dishonest steward in and commended him for his prudence, “for the sons of this world are wiser in their own generation than the sons of light.” Okay, so there's your twist.

Why would the master commend the dishonest steward, and what does he mean when he says he acted prudently? Well, two things. First, notice when Luke calls the steward dishonest that gives you the clue here to the fact that what he just did, by changing the bills of the debtors, was theft, right? He did something wrong—morally wrong, unjust. *Adikia* is the Greek. So I just bring that up because sometimes people kind of miss that. They think maybe, “Oh, he’s just being really nice,” he's adjusting the tabs, or he's forgiving certain people’s debts. No, no, no. He's not forgetting their debts; he doesn't have the authority to do that. He's just the *oikonomos*; he doesn't have the right to pay off their debts with his master's. Well, he's stealing from him, so he's an unjust steward. So why does the master commend him for being prudent? Well, the greek word there is *phronimōs*, which is actually a virtue in the Wisdom of Solomon. It's one of the four virtues—you know, prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude. So he's depicting him, he's calling him unjust in the story—Luke is calling him unjust—but the master is saying that he's prudent.

Well, what's the explanation? Jesus gives you the answer. He says, “The sons of this world are wiser than the sons of light.” Now what does that mean? Okay, in order to understand this explanation, you have to know a little bit—surprise, surprise—about first-century Judaism. Are you surprised at this point? No, probably not. It's interesting...the expression “this world” is one that we've come across before, the difference between “this world” and “the world to come.” So in Judaism, there was this idea of two worlds or two creations—the old creation and the new creation. The old creation is called “this world,” *HaOlam HaZeh*, and then the new creation is called “the world to come,” or *HaOlam HaBa*, the one that is coming. And the idea was, was that the old world was fallen; it was a realm of sin—you know, this world that we live in—but that one day it'd be replaced by a new world, a new creation, which would be full of light and peace and justice and everlasting life. Isaiah describes this at the end of his book of prophecy. So what Jesus is doing is he's talking about these two different kinds of people, two different groups of people. “The sons of this world” are the ones who belong to this

fallen world, or this sinful world. “The sons of light” are those who are destined to dwell in the new creation, or the “world to come.” And what’s fascinating about this is we actually know this from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Until the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the 1940s, this imagery of sons of light and sons of darkness—or sons of this world and sons of light—was only present in the Gospels. We have it here in the Gospel of Luke, in one brief passage, and then in the Gospel of John 12:36. Jesus actually talks about the sons of light and the sons of darkness. Well, those expressions aren’t anywhere in the Old Testament. But when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the late 1940s, lo and behold, many of the scrolls speak about the sons of light or the sons of darkness, or the sons of wickedness...this imagery of belonging to—you know—two different categories of people, the good and the bad, the good and the wicked, the sons of light and the sons of darkness. So this is a standard Jewish category for the good and the evil, or those who belong to this world of sin and those who are destined to live in the new world, the new creation. So what Jesus is doing here is he’s making a point by saying that this steward, who’s obviously a son of this world, who belongs to this world, who’s in love with the money and the things of this world, is actually thinking ahead. He’s more prudent than some of the sons of light are, because he’s basically taking from his master in order to secure his own future. He’s making sure that once he loses his status as steward, he’s going to have friends who will welcome him into their homes, so that he’s not poor and he’s not destitute.

Okay, so with that in mind, then, now we come to the point at the end of the parable. Jesus now does something even more unexpected, this is like the second twist: he gives us the *nimshal*. And remember I’ve said before, the *nimshal* is a Hebrew word for the explanation for the parable, or we might call it the upshot, or the point. It’s some kind of exhortation or explanation at the end that kind of gives you the clue to the meaning of the whole. In this case, it’s the most puzzling of his *nimshals* because he says, “I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails, they may receive you into eternal habitation.” Okay, so there’s your application. So essentially what Jesus is saying there is, make friends for yourselves by means of stolen money. That’s what “unrighteous mammon” means. So mammon, if you recall, is the Aramaic word for money. Unrighteous mammon would be stolen money—in other words, money

that was gotten in some kind of underhanded way, like the dishonest steward. So Jesus is saying to his disciples, “Make friends for yourselves by means of stolen money, so that when the money runs out, they're going to receive you into eternal habitations.”

Now literally, the Greek here is eternal *skēnē*, or eternal tents, or eternal tabernacles. Now if you know anything about Judaism, you'll know that the Feast of Tabernacles, or Feast of Booths was one of those festivals where they would set up tents around Jerusalem. They would dwell in the tents. It was both an echo of the exodus from Egypt and a foretaste of the new creation, a foretaste of the *HaOlam HaBa*, the world to come— when everyone would dwell in tents in the presence of the Lord and they would feast on wine and have great banquets and kind of celebrate the resurrection of the dead and everlasting life.

So, when Jesus is talking here about eternal habitations, that's the clue to you that he's not talking about earthly wealth, when he says, “make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon.” He's not talking about making friends in an earthly way for earthly gain and earthly goods, like the parable of the steward. The whole parable is eschatological—it's pointing forward to the final judgment, it's pointing forward to the end of time. And somehow, he's trying to counsel his disciples to pay off—watch this—pay off other people's debts with the Lord's money, with the Master's money, with wealth that doesn't really belong to them, so that when their money runs out, those people will welcome you into these eternal tabernacles, or eternal tents, some kind of heavenly dwelling place.

Okay. So that's the point of the parable. Now, before we go on, what often happens here is, I think people get confused because they move straight into the next verses, assuming that it's actually part of this parable. But I don't think that's the case—I'll get there in just a second. I think, as usually is the case, the *nimshal* is the ending of the parable. It kind of gives you the point, gives you the explanation. So I want to make sure we try to explain what we just read with this explanation in mind, before we move to the next verses. So in this case, what is Jesus talking about? Well, think about it for just a minute. Think about the imagery that he's using here—the images of debt, the imagery of wealth, the imagery of the lord, the master, and also this imagery of eternal habitations — using wealth to secure yourself a place in the kingdom of God. We've seen this before in the Gospel of

Luke, haven't we? If you go back, for example, to Luke chapter 12, you'll recall Jesus talked about selling your possessions (in Luke 12:33): "give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." And then again in Luke 12:21, he says, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

So we've encountered this idea before in Jesus' teaching about spiritual wealth, or about putting down payments down now for your eternal reward. And in particular, in Luke chapter 12, if you recall, what was he referring to? He was talking about almsgiving. What he was saying is, if you sell your possessions now and give to the poor, what you're going to do is build up treasure in heaven. And so, a number of scholars have actually suggested that when Jesus is talking in verse 9, what Jesus is talking about here, is again, the theme of using almsgiving to pay down your debts to God, to pay down other people's debts as well, so that they will welcome you into eternal habitations, they will welcome you into the heavenly kingdom of God. And the logic behind that is, it's simple, but it's actually profound: everything we actually possess in this world doesn't really belong to us. We're basically all stewards of the one true Master, God, who is the Lord of heaven and earth. So everything we have, in a sense, doesn't belong to us. We're doing deals, we're managing things with someone else's money. And so what Jesus is saying here is, use that unrighteous mammon, that money that doesn't really belong to you, and give it away! Be prodigal with it. Waste it on other people and give it to them and use it to pay down their debts, and what they will do is, they will reward you in the age to come.

We've seen this before where Jesus says in parables, you know, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind—people who can't pay you back — and you will be rewarded at the resurrection of the just. So in this case, the "Master" represents God, the unrighteous mammon is basically an image for earthly wealth that doesn't actually belong to us, that we've just been made stewards of, and using it to pay down other's debts is a symbol for almsgiving—giving to the poor, giving to those who are in need; wealth that really in a sense doesn't belong to us...and not just giving it away, but being rather, shall we say, prodigal with it, wasteful with it—in other words, wasting it on the poor and the needy. When you do that, they're going to receive you into eternal habitations; they'll welcome you into "the world to

come.” So that’s one of the most probable meanings of the text in its first-century Jewish context.

Now, once you get that basic point down, now you can move into verses 10-13. And what I would suggest to you here is, these verses probably aren’t meant to explain the parable that just preceded. Rather, they are a series of general maxims or teachings—proverbs, you might say—of Jesus about wealth, that are linked by catchword and theme to what precedes it. And you’ll see this happen in Luke’s Gospel over and over again. Sometimes he’ll juxtapose two sayings of Jesus because they have a word that links them together—not because they’re necessarily meant to interpret one another, but they are thematically linked to one another. And I think that’s what’s going on here.

So if you look at these as just general maxims about wealth, you can see there are basically four antitheses here: little versus much (#1), earthly mammon versus true riches or spiritual wealth (#2), another’s property versus your own property (#3) and then God versus money (#4). So if you look at each one of those, what does he say? “Whoever is faithful in a little, is also faithful in much. Whoever is dishonest in little, is also dishonest in much.” And that’s a pretty accurate description of how most people are. If you think about a person’s virtues and their character, if a person tends to be faithful in very little things or things that are unseen or things that go unnoticed, they’re more likely to be faithful in big things, right? That’s just a basic observation of human character that Jesus is using here. And obviously, it applies with money. If someone is very careful with small amounts of money, they’re going to be very careful with big amounts of money as well. The second contrast here is unrighteous mammon and true riches, so earthly wealth versus spiritual riches. So he says, if you’ve not been faithful with unrighteous mammon, who’s going to entrust to you the spiritual wealth? And that’s a good point. If you think about it for a minute, if someone is wasteful or they don’t take seriously earthly money or unrighteous mammon which, by the way, let me...I just thought of something.

You might not be familiar with this, but let me make clear, in the book of Sirach, one of the reasons they might be calling earthly wealth “unrighteous mammon” is because in the book of Sirach—this is standard Jewish idea—there’s this teaching. I can’t remember where it is right now because I’m Catholic, so just trust me, it’s

in the book of Sirach. It basically says there's no way to be engaged in the marketplace or in buying and selling without committing some sin. In other words, there's going to be some injustice that accompanies buying and trade. It's just intrinsic to the nature of trade, is that somebody's going to get an unfair deal at some point or another. And it's almost impossible to avoid sinning—at least in a very small way—if you're engaged in bartering and trading and economic exchanges. So that may kind of lay behind the idea of all earthly mammon is unrighteous versus all spiritual wealth being true or good. And in any case, righteous mammon is being contrasted with true riches, so obviously the meaning there is earthly wealth versus spiritual wealth. And what Jesus is saying here is, if you've not been faithful in earthly wealth, then how will you—or who's going to entrust you with—heavenly wealth? And then again, if you've not been faithful in that which belongs to somebody else, who's going to give you that which is your own?

So think about this, we all know this: the difference between how we treat somebody else's property and how we treat our own property. So if we have our own property, we tend to take great care of it. But it's very easy to become negligent or not as concerned if it's someone else's property. And so what he's saying here is, if you've not been faithful in that which is another's—think here of the steward, there is a link here—who will give you that which is your own? And then finally he sums it all up with a passage we've seen before in other Gospels: “no one can serve two masters.” You can't serve God and money. You either love one and hate the other, or you're devoted to one and you despise the other. So the implication there is to make God your Master, make spiritual wealth your true aim, and to be faithful even in your earthly dealings with earthly money, so that God will entrust to you the spiritual riches of the kingdom of God.

So that's how I would interpret that last section there of those general maxims about relationships between earthly wealth and heavenly wealth, or between mammon and things of God.

Alright, so that's the Gospel for today. We'll come back to how it was interpreted in the living tradition at the end of the video. Real quickly, let's just go back to the Old Testament for just a moment and look at the first reading and the psalm for today. So in this case, the first reading is from the book of Amos 8:4-7, a very

famous oracle of Amos against the wealthy people of Israel, who were oppressing the poor. And in Amos 8:4-7, we read these words:

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy,
and bring the poor of the land to an end,
saying, “When will the new moon be over,
that we may sell grain?
And the sabbath,
that we may offer wheat for sale,
that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and deal deceitfully with false balances,
that we may buy the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and sell the refuse of the wheat?”
The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
“Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.”

So look here, you don't even have to go back to Sirach. I forgot about the first reading, it's right here in the first reading: the idea that those who are engaged in trade often would commit the sin of theft by changing the weights, the systems of weights and measures, adjusting the balances. Because that's how things were measured in ancient times, they would use scales, so in this case, notice what they're doing. They're engaging in economic injustice, which I think we call price manipulation today, I'm not sure exactly what the technical term is...but they're messing with the price of goods. And so it says, they make the ephah (which is a unit of measurement) small and the shekel great. So they're inflating one and reducing the other to make the most profit. They have false scales, so the scales are weighted falsely at the tables where they would sell and buy things. And the goal to do it is to buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. In other words, they'll abuse the poor and abuse the needy and sell the refuse of the wheat. In other words, this'll be the worst of the wheat. They'll sell it as if it's the good kernels, but it's actually the worst product out there.

So what God is saying here through Amos to the people is, “I'm not going to miss any one of these economic injustices.” You might think that fixing the scales or

cooking the books at the office—or whatever it is—you might think that that little small acts of theft go unnoticed and unpunished by God, but you’re wrong. The God of Israel, the Lord of heaven and earth, even notices down to the smallest sin when it comes to economic injustice. And he’s going to bring justice, he’s going to judge the wicked, he’s going to judge the wealthy, he’s going to judge those who are engaged in trade, who are cheating one another. Now if you just ponder that for a second...imagine all of the cheating and lying and theft that goes on in all of the economies in the world throughout all of human history. How long is that going to take to deal with at the last judgment? I mean, it’s incalculable, literally—but not to God. He knows it all, and he will act swiftly. He is not going to forget any act of theft. So that just gives you a bit of the background for the parable of today, because effectively, what the parable of the dishonest steward is about, too, is a kind of judgment—that God is going to bring judgment, that the Master will eventually discover what has taken place, just like the lord discovers the injustice.

And so the responsorial psalm today, Psalm 113, has in its refrain: “The Lord lifts up the poor,” because God has a special love, a special faithfulness to the poor and needy. Because obviously, so often it is the poor of society who bear the brunt of economic injustice, who bear the brunt of this kind of theft that we see taking place in the book of Amos.

Okay, in closing, I’d like to just give a couple of quotations from the living tradition of the Church, just so you’re clear that this isn’t just my interpretation. So I’d like to begin with St. Ephrem the Syrian. He’s a Doctor of the Church, fourth-century writer in the East and writing in Syriac. And in his commentary on the Gospels—the four Gospels—he actually addresses this parable in particular. And this is what Ephrem says:

The perverse astuteness of this unjust steward was praised in the presence of his master. For he had unjustly squandered the initial treasures, and then unjustly and cunningly remitted the later debts. He was praised, therefore, because, by means of that which was not his, he set about acquiring that which was to be his, namely friends and supporters... Buy for yourselves, O sons of Adam, those things which do not pass away, by means of those transitory things which are not yours!²

² Ephrem, *Commentary on Tatian’s Diatesseron* 14.21; trans. C. McCarthy

So there we see from very ancient times, St. Ephrem the Syrian interpreting this parable first and foremost as a parable about almsgiving. In other words, buying for myself through the giving of alms, eternal rewards based on property that isn't in fact mine. These are—money, wealth, property—it's all transitory. At the end of the day, it doesn't really belong to me; it belongs to the Master. So what Ephrem is saying here is to give it away—in almsgiving—just like the steward, who was thinking about his future. So, too, we should think about our future, but not our earthly future, our eternal security...our eternal future in the kingdom of heaven.

We see a similar point from St. Augustine in one of his sermons, where he's emphatic about the fact that the parable isn't to be taken literally. This isn't to be seen as Jesus actually endorsing—or literally endorsing—stealing or the unjust actions of the stewards, but rather that they're an allegory about our relationship with God. This is what St. Augustine said:

Why did the Lord Jesus Christ present this parable to us? *He surely did not approve of that cheat of a servant who cheated his master, stole from him, and did not make it up from his own pocket.*

Pause. Notice, Augustine understands the economic injustice involved in the parable. He recognizes that this steward is stealing from his master and cooking the books. Augustine continues:

On top of that, he also did some extra pilfering. *He caused his master further loss*, in order to prepare a little nest of quiet and security for himself after he lost his job. Why did the Lord set this before us? *It is not because that servant cheated but because he exercised foresight for the future.* When even a cheat is praised for ingenuity, Christians who make no such provision blush. I mean, this is what he added, 'Behold, the children of this age are more prudent than the children of light.' They perpetrate frauds in order to secure their future. In what life, after all, did that steward insure himself like that? What one was he going to quit when he bowed to his master's decision? *He was insuring himself for a life that was going to end. Would you not insure yourself for eternal life?*³

³ Augustine, *Sermon* 359A.10; cited in A. A. Just, *ACCS*, p. 255

That's the point. So notice that what Augustine saying here is, that the servant's not being commended for his wickedness, he's being commended for his foresight. And what Jesus is saying is that if people in this world go to extreme measures to think about providing for themselves for the future, even so much as to steal, then how much more should Christians—should disciples of Jesus—go to extreme measures to prepare for and to ensure for our eternal inheritance, for our eternal life, for our being welcomed into eternal habitations into the kingdom of heaven?

And let's face it, think about how much time people today—including Christians—spend thinking about their retirement plans and their 401ks and putting away money for the future, and savings and all kinds of things, investments. It is a very popular, very common, in the west at least, for Christians to put down lots of money down in investments for the future. Okay, fine...what kind of spiritual investments have you made? What monies have you put into your spiritual bank account? How much have you thought about your spiritual future, and what are you doing with your spiritual wealth that's been entrusted to you? That's what the parable is all about. And so this imagery of the unjust steward is a really striking and memorable way of getting us to wake up and to start thinking prudently, and to not let the "sons of this world" be smarter about their earthly future than we as disciples of Jesus are smart about our heavenly future.