

# Jesus the Investment Banker

This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, [churchofgodbigandy.com](http://churchofgodbigandy.com). It was posted for the weekend of Sept. 3-4, 2011.

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LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.—The economy has a way of commanding our attention, and it should. While it's tempting to ask what Jesus might do in times like these, it's a tough question to answer without asking more questions. Do you mean what would He do as a carpenter from Nazareth? That would elicit an entirely different answer from what He would do as the King of Kings.

Just for the fun of it, let's try to figure out what Jesus the investment banker might do. In fact, Jesus spoke a couple of parables that give us a strong indication of how He would approach a few challenges our economy faces.

In Luke 19 Jesus pictures Himself as an investor who has a few bucks (or pounds) to put to work. He chooses 10 people, gives each of them the same amount of capital to invest and tells them to do business with it while He's out of town.

Some time later, He calls his 10 entrepreneurs together to assess how they have done.

Note that He gave capital to 10 entrepreneurs, but in the parable He interviewed only three of them. Two of the three made good returns, and the third did nothing more than turn the original investment back over. Is it possible that the remaining seven lost everything? If so, are we permitted to contemplate that maybe those seven were not condemned for losing it all because at least they were willing to take a few risks, while the fellow who simply sat on his capital did receive a condemnation?

In any case, the investment banker makes a decision. He takes the money away from the guy who has just the one pound that he was given and gives it to the guy who has 10. That sounds callous to our ears today. In fact, the disciples themselves questioned the fairness of this: "But, Lord! He already has ten pounds!" (Luke 19:25).

That is what Jesus the investment banker would do. Instead of subsidizing ventures that are destined to fail, He would direct his capital to the ventures that would be the most productive.

That's as it should be. The banker began with 10 pounds, and, after His entrepreneurs went to work, His wealth had grown to sixteen (10 + 5 + 1). If He had tried to subsidize the unproductive enterprises via capital injection

taken from the successful, He would eventually erode all His capital on the not-so-successful entrepreneurs, who would have been better served finding another line of work.

I suspect Ronald Reagan might have had this parable in mind when he said, "The government's view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it."

Jesus might have had in mind the proverb from Ecclesiastes: "Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well" (Ecclesiastes 11:16).

The main actor in this parable clearly diversified his investments.

So Jesus the investment banker would not be doing to the financial system what some are doing today. Instead of injecting capital into failing institutions, He would be investing in those that have a proven ability to succeed.

What would Jesus do? Something radically different from what is being done. And that should be no surprise to anyone.