

The Parable of the Talents

Mt. 25:14-30

Thank you for my birthday and my desk! Today we're finishing up our series on the parables of Jesus. Jesus has just finished up with two parables about the importance of being aware of and ready for Christ's return. And the parable we're going to look at today, is going to talk about what our lives should look like, in the meantime—like, how should the fact I know Jesus is returning then affect the way I live now? And to show us what that looks like, Jesus tells a story about a master who went away on a journey and he entrusted three servants with his property. And he distributed that property to them in the form of talents. Now specifically in this context, a talent was about 20 years wages for the common laborer. So this is a lot of money we're talking about here. And he gives the first guy 5 talents—that's 100 years worth of salary. And he gave the second guy 2 talents about 40 years of salary and the last guy one talent and then he leaves and tells that at some point he'll be back. And the first two servants take their money and invest it—the text uses the word “traded” and it's referring to business here. They took the money and through hard work and ingenuity, multiplied the money that was given to them.

But the third guy took a different approach. He buried the money in order to keep it safe. And the Master comes back to settle accounts and the first servant steps up and is rewarded. Same with the second servant. But when it comes to the third guy, the master is angry. And it's important for us this morning to understand why. Why is the master angry? Is it because he lost some of it? No, vs. 25 says it was all there. He's not a penny short! Is he just a money hungry man who is upset because the guy didn't make more? Full disclosure: the Master represents Jesus so that's not a viable option. Was he acting unethically? The text doesn't indicate that—one author says it this way “There seems to be no stealing, immorality, or even reckless irresponsibility involved. He didn't blow the master's money on partying, prostitutes, gambling, or first-class accommodations in the Caribbean. In fact, he had not spend a single penny on himself. He returned 100 percent of what he had been given to the master and for that Jesus called him wicked.” (*Gaining By Losing*, 181).

Is this strange to anyone? Like is this an overreaction? Like lazy, sure but wicked and worthless? Our intuitions say, “No” but Jesus says, “Yes”. This is challenging for us because it forces us to rethink what wickedness looks like. When we think of a wicked person, we think of someone who does bad things. But what if I told you that you can be equally wicked because of what you don't do? That you can be wicked not because of your actions but because of your inaction! Like you look at this guy and he hasn't lost a penny he hasn't misused the money or spent it on himself, and Jesus calls him, wicked and you say C'mon Jesus he didn't even do anything...exactly—and that's wicked. That's what this parable is teaching us and if we're going to understand that, we're going to have to dive a little bit deeper and I pray that as we do, God will open our eyes to see what's going on here, and help us understand what a life changed by the Gospel looks like. **PRAY!**

Now to understand this parable it's really important, to notice exactly what the Master does in vs. 14. Notice that the text says he entrusted to them his property. Now the word entrust here doesn't mean that he gave them his assets to keep. It means that he gave them his assets to cultivate. To increase them. They were supposed to take the resources they had been given and multiply them for the sake of the Master. Now you may wonder, well are we all supposed to be entrepreneurs and double our money? Well, no. We *did* say said that the talents here represented financial resources, but we have to remember this is a parable and parables use specific examples to teach much broader principles.

And here's one of three: **Believers are called to multiply, not maintain, the things God has entrusted to them.** And I use that word "entrusted" and Jesus uses that word "entrusted" intentionally. Remember the Master didn't give them his resources, he temporarily entrusted them with his resources. And we can't afford to miss this. We have a dangerous tendency to believe the lie that the things we have are ultimately ours. Like the money, talents, abilities, stuff I have, man that's mine! I'm not temporarily managing someone else's resources. This stuff belongs to me... But it doesn't and until we realize that we won't use it properly—Driving Robin's car example! Why do we not think of the resources and abilities God has given us that way? The reason that is so dangerous is that when you think everything you have is really yours you feel like you you can do whatever you want with it. Isn't this how we think? Like if it's mine, I can do what I want with it? And until we get into this mindset, we won't properly steward the resources that have been given to us.

Given to us? Chase I work hard for my money, no one gives me that, "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day." (Deut. 8:17-18) Ok well I'm talented I'm creative and artistic surely that's mine right? No, "Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— 4 to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, 5 to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts." (Ex. 31:2-5) What about my body, surely if anything, that belong to me, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Cor. 6:19-20) Everything we have is from God, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Cor. 4:7)

Everything we have is from God and it's been given to us to use and to multiply for the sake and God and his kingdom! So don't miss this—the question here isn't not whether or not we enjoyed or even appreciated God's blessings—this is not a sermon on gratitude. Gratitude is not the measure of faithfulness. Faithfulness to God is not seen in whether or not your thankful for what he gave you, but in how you used what he gave you for the sake of kingdom. Like if someone asks you to describe your response to all the blessings God has given you and them sum total of your answer is, "I thank him every morning" we've got big problems. You'll notice that vs. 15 says that the talents were distributed according to each person's ability—that is ability to multiply it, not their capacity to enjoy it. If Jesus knocks on the door his primary concern is not if you liked the gift, but what you did with it. Compassion—what did you do with that—cry in more movies? Money? Just found 500,000 dollars? That's why we have it! Everything on the table... My car—not just a personal luxury but a gospel delivery, meal providing, transportation assistance vehicle. My house—not just a personal retreat but a hospitality showing, shelter providing, people feeding, disciple-making center. You see the third guy isn't called wicked because he misused what given him, but that he didn't use it. He's the guy who has resources and abilities and does nothing with them beyond enjoying them. But that's not faithfulness. Faithfulness is taking everything we've been given and multiplying it for the sake of the Master.

And if we're going to do that it's going to require something that's uncomfortable for most of us with which brings me to principle number two: **Investing God's resources for kingdom return will involve risk.**

Look at vs. 16, “He who had received the five talents went at once and trade with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more.” Now we said that traded here means that these guys invested the money and did business with it. Now that may sound fair enough but if you know anything about business and investing, you know that there are no guarantees—in fact there is huge risk involved. One study done by the Harvard Business School showed that 75% of venture funded startups fail. Now I want you to think about these servants—for simplicity sake, the first one. Using a \$50k salary for today, this dude guy was entrusted with 5 million dollars! And he takes another man’s money and his first thought is not to keep it safe and protect it. He doesn’t hold onto it and save it. He invests it. He risks losing the Master’s money in order to multiply it. The third guy, digs a hole in the ground and buries the money. And when the Master comes back, the guys who risked are rewarded and the one who played it safe is condemned!

But isn’t this kind of risk what we see over and over again throughout Scripture? It’s Queen Esther going before the King to plead for her people even though she knows she could lose her life. You what she said about that risk in Esther 4:16 “If I perish, I perish.” It’s Shadrach Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3 standing before king Nebuchadnezzar saying “we’re not going to bow down to that statue you made.” He says, “If you do not worship you shall immediately will be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands?” They responded in Dan. 3 “We have no need to answer you...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if he does not, be it known to you O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” Risking life itself for the sake of God’s glory! It’s Jonathan and his armor bearer in 1 Sam. 14 who stumble upon a company Philistines as they’re walking in the wilderness alone, and rather than call for backup Jonathan says, Come let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will act on our behalf...”

And while we certainly don’t want to be reckless or unintelligent about anything we do, we need to ask ourselves this morning, am I taking any risks at all for the sake of Christ or am I intentionally steering away from risk and uncertainty? Like is there anything about the way we’re living and using our resources and talents that would lead us to bust if God doesn’t come through? Are our lives mark by any risk at all? The truth is for some of us, we’re hardly willing to risk what might be an awkward conversation to share the gospel much less our money, talents, family and resources. And if that’s the case, then we need to ask the question, why? And if we look at the third’s servant’s interaction with his master, we’ll get the answer...

Vs. 24 “He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’”

Why did the third servant not risk and work to multiply what had been entrusted with? Because he thought his master was a jerk. He was hard and unfair. Is this not how our culture if not some folks in the church think about God. Hard—just wants me to keep his rules is mad at me most of the time. Unfair—doesn’t let me do a lot of fun stuff and gives other people more than me. And it’s no coincidence that people who think that about God, don’t do much for God. It’ll be true for us just like it was true for this guy. The reason servant #3 wasn’t faithful and wasn’t committed to multiplying what he had been given, was because he had wrong beliefs about the goodness and character of his Master. Because he did not think his master was gracious or merciful or kind or good, he had no intentions of taking risks on his behalf.

Which leads us to principle #3: **If we are going to take risks for Christ, we must be convinced of His infinite worth.** And we get a picture of that worth in the Master's interaction in the first two servants who don't seem to share servant #3's misgivings about the master vs. 20, "And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'"

If you're servant number three, and you're watching this play out, you immediately realize, you thought wrong. Like, you thought he was overbearing and unfair, and you're realizing two things.

This Master is generous. Notice that because of their faithfulness now, they are rewarded new more excellent responsibilities in the world to come. The text isn't at all clear what those are but simply indicates that part of our reward will be a greater share in God's glorious kingdom. He continues in verse 28 "So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Now look at the irony here, the folks who had a lot and were willing to lose it, got more and the person who had little and tried to hold onto it, lost it. And it's here that we see a new kind of investment strategy that is more secure than stocks and bonds in fact in the grand scheme of things, it's risk free. It's called eternal investment and it's where I invest everything I have *now*, for a billion-fold return that is guaranteed *then*.

If it's not true then risking what we have is stupid, but if it is true then it's stupid not to! This is guaranteed return! And it's been guaranteed by the blood of Christ—eternal life won through his life and death on our behalf. This is where our confidence to risk everything comes from—Jesus is saying I have eliminated eternal risk so that you are free to take temporal risks. I've guaranteed your future so you can risk the present! It's Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who give what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." It's why Jesus said Mt. 16:25, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Because not only is this Master generous this master is the source and fountain of joy himself.

"Well done good and faithful servant—enter into the joy of your master!" This had to have been a shock to servant number #3, the idea of finding his joy in his master wasn't even on his radar. And to be completely honest sometimes I wonder if it's on our radar. I ask people this—how much do you enjoy Jesus? Savior vs. Satisfier. What do we get for faithfulness—the Master himself!

Mt. 13:44, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Why are you doing this? Like you're risking everything your reputation, your safety, your comfort..." Because he has found something worth losing everything for! Is that you? He's not interested in getting more stuff. He's willing to lose his stuff so he can get more Jesus! This is why Paul is able to say, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." God help us be a people who feel free to give our time, talents, money, and resources because we have something better.

This what servants 1 and 2 realized, they were faithful with what they were given and received life. Servant three didn't get this, he wasn't faithful to multiply what he was given, and was condemned. That's what verse 30 means, "And cast the worthless servant in the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This is hell. Now I want us to remember that this is a parable meant to teach us

what faithfulness looks like...it's not describing *how* to get to heaven—do good with what you have etc. It's giving us a picture of how folks who are saved live—how they use what God has given them. And so while this isn't how we earn salvation, I don't want to soften it either...those who love the Master live for the master...like if you're not using what God has given you we have reasons to question whether or not you're on the team. And I'd simply want to ask you, are we being faithful to leverage the resources and talents God has given us to advance his kingdom? Money? Business skills? Free time? Encouraging? Compassion? Are you using those things for the purpose God gave them to you?

And if you're not a believer in the room, your response this morning should not be to try harder. The problem is not that you're a bad person. It's that you don't know the Master. You need to know him before you try and serve him. Serving him is only a privilege for those who know him. And the first thing you need to know about this Master...is that unlike every other Master he became a servant—so that you could be free to enjoy him.

“Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God” —William Carey