

Good Investors? Matthew 25:14-30

In our scripture Jesus is in the midst of teaching parables about his return. At first Jesus talks about His return as it relates to Israel and then His return as it relates to the church. Initially Jesus described primarily the outward events of the period. Then He described inward attitudes. Last week we learned that everyone is not ready to meet the Lord, they have not prepared themselves for His return. The church has known for 2,000 years that Jesus is coming again, so there is no excuse for being unprepared. Today we can make preparations by inviting Jesus to be our Lord and Savior and He will give us ability to show love and mercy now and in eternity.

Our Declaration of Independence says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights.” However it appears that we are not equally endowed; God has given to different persons different talents. Some have much more than others. Perhaps what we can learn is that God expects each of us to use the same energy, and the same effort, in cultivating the talent that we have been given.

In Jesus’ parable today we learn about good investments and faithfulness. I realize with the economies of today being in turmoil, it is hard for many of us to think about investing. If you are like me and my family you have seen your investments and retirement nest eggs decrease. The minute we think there is a upturn in the economy, something happens in this country or in the European Union or in China that makes the stock market and our investments loss ground in a matter of hours. The bad news is that our money is subject to the ups and downs of the economy. The good news is that what God invests in us can be used for God’s kingdom and people with no fear of the current economy!

In this parable on faithfulness, Jesus told the story of a master with three servants. The master went on a journey and gave each servant a specific amount of money, talents. The talents were of silver. A talent weighed between 58 and 80 pounds, and worth about \$1,000 in our currency, depending upon the value of silver on a given day. So the master entrusted his servants with considerable amounts of money. The amounts were in keeping with each person's abilities.

Two of the servants were faithful in caring for the master's money (verses 16-17) and were accordingly rewarded for their faithfulness with additional wealth, additional responsibilities, and sharing of the master's joy (vv. 20-23). The third servant, having received the one talent, reasoned that his master might not be coming back at all. If he did return someday, the servant could simply return the talent to his master without loss from any poor investment (verse 25). But if he failed to return, the servant wanted to be able to keep the talent for himself. He did not want to deposit the talent in a bank where it would be recorded that the talent belonged to the master (v. 27). His reasoning showed he lacked faith in his master; and therefore he proved to be a worthless servant. As a result, he lost what he had (v. 29; compare 13:12), and was cast into judgment. This Parable of the Talents stressed the need to serve the King while He is away.¹

Like the preceding one this parable had an immediate lesson for those who heard it for the first time, and a whole series of permanent lessons for us today.

There can be no doubt that originally in this parable the whole attention is riveted on the useless servant. Scholars have little doubt that the useless servant stands for the Scribes and the Pharisees, and for their attitude to the Law and the truth of God. The useless servant buried his talent in the ground, in order that he might hand it back to his master exactly as it was. The whole aim of the Scribes

¹Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:80

and Pharisees was to keep the Law exactly as it was. In their own phrase, they sought “to build a fence around the Law.” Any change, any development, any alteration, anything new was anathema. Their method involved the paralysis of religious truth, therefore there was no room in their minds for Jesus to be the Messiah.

Like the man with the talent, they desired to keep things exactly as they were—and it is for that they are condemned. In this parable Jesus tells us that there can be no religion without adventure, and that God can find no use for the shut mind. But there is much more in this parable than that.

First this parable tells us that God gives his people differing gifts. One person received five talents, another two, and another one. It is not a person’s talent that matters; what matters is how they use it. God never demands abilities from a person which they don’t have; but God does demand that a person use to the fullest of their ability what they do possess. We are not equal in talent; but we can be equal in effort. The parable tells us that whatever talent we have, little or great, we must lay it at the service of God.

Secondly this parable tells us that the reward of work well done is still more work to do. The two servants who had done well are not told to lean back and rest on their oars because they have done well. They are given greater tasks and greater responsibilities in the work of the master. However the master also gives his fellowship to those who have done their work well. We may have hoped to hear that a load is removed from us and the burden ceases. We would like a reprieve, a rest from all of work. However God counts on those who have done their work well to do more.

Is what the servant with the one talent did so bad? He simply took the talent that he was given and buried it in the ground. He knew the master was a rather harsh man; one who had great expectations of him. He put the talent away so that he could give it back upon the master’s return. The one talent man simply played

it safe. However this parable tells us that the person who is punished is the one who will not try. The person with the one talent did not lose that talent; they simply did nothing with it. Even if they had adventured with it and lost it, it would have been better than to do nothing at all. It is always a temptation for the one talent person to say, "I have so small a talent and I can do so little with it. It is not worth while to try, for all the contribution I can make." The condemnation is for this person who, having even one talent, will not try to use it, and will not risk it for the common good.

Fourth, this parable lays down a rule of life which is universally true. It tells us that to one who has more will be given, and one who has not will lose even what they have. The meaning is this. If a person has a talent and exercises it, they are progressively able to do more with it. But, if one has a talent and fails to exercise it, they will inevitably lose it. If we have some proficiency at a game or an art, if we have some gift for doing something, the more we exercise that proficiency and that gift, the harder the work and the bigger the task we will be able to tackle. Whereas, if we fail to use it, we lose it. What would happen if an Olympic champion in the 100-meter dash decided to run again in another Olympics? However, he remembered all the practice and all the training it took to achieve what he achieved. So he concluded, "I'll not train like that this next time. I'll simply wait until the time of the trials and then run my first race." What he will find is that he no longer has the speed he once had! Or what if a concert pianist who had thrilled audiences all over America and Europe decided she was tired of constant practice, so she does not practice for an entire year. When the time for another concert arrives, she will find the skills she once had on the keyboard have diminished. She has to use it or lose it. That is equally true of playing a sport, or playing the piano, or singing songs or writing story, of painting a picture, of carving wood or thinking out ideas.

Years ago it was the practice after surgery to keep patients in their hospital bed for two weeks at a time or longer. Then they would be assisted in attempting to walk. What they found is their muscles had lost nearly all their strength and the patient could hardly walk at all. And so it is with all God-given talents. Those that go unused deteriorate. Talents are not to be placed on a shelf like some museum pieces to be admired from a distance.

According to the parable, what God condemns is our unwillingness to try. The unused faculty becomes extinct. If the workers of Christ cease to work, then Christ's work will never be done. Edward Everett Hale once said, "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something; and because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do. I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do." It is the lesson of life that the only way to keep a gift is to use it in the service of God and in the service to those in God's world.^{2 3} God does not want our excuses; God wants our actions to show that we put our trust in God and that we are faithful until Christ returns. Are you investing for eternity?

² Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume 2*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible, Rev. Ed), S. 321

³ Bergland, John K., ed. *Abingdon Preacher's Annual 1993*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1992, p 357-362