TIME, "TALENTS" AND TREASURES

The Risk of Not Taking Risks

Matthew 25:14-30

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Are you a risk taker? Let me ask you, what's the "risk" in taking a risk? Why do we or would anyone take a risk? And I think the most important question, for us as Christians, is what risks do we *really* have? Let me ask that a different way, what risks do Christians really need to take? Think about that and let's revisit it at the end of the message time.

Now, let me ask you a more practical question. If you earned $500 last week, how of that money is God's? $50 dollars? God's Law of tithing calls for us to give 10% of our first-fruits to God, but I'm not talking about tithing or even stewardship here. Remember that God made the world and everything in it so the correct answer is that if you earned $500 last week, it all belongs to God. All $500 dollars.

In our Gospel reading today, we heard Jesus' parable of the Talents, where an obviously very rich man entrusted servants with different huge amounts of money. Now, a Talent was about six thousand Denarii, and a Denarius represented a day's wage for a typical working man. So think about that, a Talent was the equivalent to about six thousand days' worth of pay...at least 20 years' worth of pay to the average working person then. That's just one Talent...the text tells us that a man was going on a journey, and he "called

his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability."

So what happened? Well, the one who received five talents immediately put the money to work and ended up doubling the investment. Likewise, the one who received two. "But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money." See, he put it into the ground because burying it, at the time, was as secure as it could be...

Then, the parable tells us that "after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them." To both of the servants who had doubled the money, the master said, "well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Now let me ask you, is this a parable about capitalism? Not by a long-shot. You see, think about when Jesus returns. Just like this master returned "after a long time," Jesus will return one day...maybe TODAY...and settle accounts with us as well. Now, will Jesus judge us on whether we have doubled the money in our bank accounts? No, remember, as I said a moment ago, it's ALL God's money anyway. But what about the gifts God has given to each believer? Our time, our talents and gifts?

God has blessed each one of us with unique gifts. To some it is the gift of compassion. To some, it is the gift of protecting or teaching others. To others, it is the gift of material possessions or wealth. The question that Jesus raises then here in this parable, is what are YOU doing with what God has gifted you with? How are you "investing" what God has given to you?

Think about that friends. Jesus will come back one day and will ask for an accounting of what you have done with the gifts He has given to you. Have you taken whatever gift that might be and just stuck it in the ground? Or are you investing it to grow it larger? See, the wicked servant was lazy and unfaithful, because if he really had feared his master, he would have at least deposited the money with the bankers. That way the master would have received it back with at least a little interest.

This parable illustrates that a person must use what God has given or else lose it. And again, this isn't just about money, but it also includes abilities and spiritual gifts. If God has given you the ability to relate to children, let's say to teach children, then you need to use that gift to teach God's children. If you do that, then not only does God get better educated children because you taught those kids, but He gets a better YOU because you did this on His behalf. But if you don't, that gift will be taken from you.

If God has given you the gift of compassion, use that gift to bring spiritual comfort to those who are hurting. But if you don't, that gift will be taken from you.

If God has given you the gift of possessions, use those gifts to help God's children. And that can look like many different things. Feeding the poor. Or funding education programs through the Church. Being a big brother or a dad to somebody who doesn't have a dad in their life. Or the message of stewardship in the church. Supporting the church financially so that the Church can reach out to a local neighborhood or out to the world to reach those who are lost—who don't know Jesus yet as Savior. It can look like so many different things. But if you don't, that gift will be taken from you.

During difficult times like this, it would be so easy to take what God has given us and bury it. Do nothing with it. Like, instead of going out and showing compassion to a hurting world, staying inside where it's safe. It's easy to think that this is the safest—the "right" thing to do, but really, that's Satan deceiving us into burying whatever talent God has given us to keep it safe...doing nothing with this unique gift from the Lord.

See friends, when you trust God, when you allow God to work through you, He will continue to bless you over and over again with many gifts, whatever they might look like. He'll use these gifts in so many different ways of Kingdom work. But if you don't trust God, if you resist allowing Him to work through you, those gifts come back to God un-grown...without interest. You come back to God that way, un-grown. And a faith that doesn't grow, dies. It is as James says, "Faith without works is dead." But faith that does work is a living faith. It is as Luther says,

"Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. And so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question rises, it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them."

So at the beginning of my sermon I asked you what risks a Christian really takes when he does works of faith. When he works to grow God's investment in him. And the answer? ***None***. Not when you truly believe that everything is God's anyway, and so there is nothing to fear and nothing to lose because it is God's anyway. So do we just sit there and do nothing with God's gifts to us—do we try to "play it safe," or do we go out and take a risk and work at giving the Master so much more than He originally entrusted with us?

Friends, God has invested so much in you. God has invested the life of His one and only Son into you. And He wants you to do something with that investment. Because He wants a return on that investment...a return that looks like His Gospel being taken to the ends of the earth. So what are you doing? Are you just sitting there, or are you allowing God to grow you and his kingdom through you? Remember, YOU are HIS! So what do you have to lose? Amen.