

The Rich Get Richer.....
Matthew 25: 14-30

One of the things many people have learned over the years is the importance of having a good investment adviser. Learning how to invest wisely is important if we wish to have a secure future. Many of us don't have such knowledge, so we either hire an expert to manage our money for us or else trust our employer or the government to manage our retirement fund. Few of us can bury our treasure in the backyard and expect it to pay for our retirement. As the cost of things increase our funds must also increase accordingly. Even the most novice of investors would be wary of advice that says you can hide your hard-earned money under a mattress and have it increase in value. Whether it is one dollar or one thousand, its value will not increase over time without wise investing.

Shrewd investors divest themselves of investments that fail to provide a good return, and the startling thing about this parable is that God may do the same. We begin this morning with an eternal spiritual truth: God owns everything.

Psalm 24:1 *1 The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains; the world, and those who dwell in it.*

1 Corinthians 10:26 *for the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains.*

Job 41:11 *"Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.*

God owns everything, but God also shares some of that everything with each one of us. Psalm 115:16. *The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth He has given to the sons of men.*

We are to invest what we have been given and have them increase for the sake of the kingdom. We have been given great treasure, and it makes good sense to turn to an expert for advice on how to make it grow. When it comes to preparing for our future and managing what God has given us, Jesus is the greatest investment advisor we can turn to. Look with me at what He is teaching us in this parable. Like the parable of the bridesmaids we looked at last week, the parable of the talents or valuable coins is also about the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a man travelling to a far country who called his servants and delivered his goods to them for safekeeping. To one he gave 5 valuable coins, to another two and to another one, each according to his own ability. Just how valuable were those coins? Older translations of the Bible use the word talent instead of valuable coin. Our modern ears think of a talent as a skill or ability, but in Jesus day a talent was a unit of weight, like an ounce or a pound. A talent was approximately 3000 shekels, which was a silver coin that was worth 4 days wages.

Today, the median wage in the US is around \$ 19.00 per hour so 4 days wages is \$ 608.00. Silver is currently trading at \$ 24.00 per ounce, so that means a shekel is the equivalent of about 25 ounces of silver. I'll spare you the rest of the math, but the bottom line is this: a talent is 4687 pounds of silver- more than 2 tons. Today these valuable coins would be worth about \$ 1.8 million each, which we should all agree is a lot of money. The people in Jesus audience were astounded that the man entrusted such a huge amount of money to his servants instead of to his investment advisers. Even today that would be an unthinkable idea. Who would do such a thing? Remember that the treasure was not a gift to be used with as they pleased, but something they were to take reasonable care and custody of until the owner returned from his journey.

Notice that the three servants did not all receive the same amount. Even if the man didn't count the coins out in plain view, they would have noticed that some sacks were bigger than others. But Jesus said all three received something, meted out in proportion to their own ability. Even the third guy received almost 2 million. **God loves all of us equally, yet when it comes to grace, some receive more than others. Even so, all receive some.**

Verse 19- after a long time their master returned and settled accounts with them. Verses 20-23- two were rewarded for their faithfulness. We don't know exactly how much was earned by the first two men over the years. It is possible they tripled or quadrupled what they had been entrusted with. What we do know is that each returned with an amount that was double what was given them years earlier. Their master was pleased, and they were each rewarded equally- not just for their hard work but for something even more important- their faithfulness- their willingness to do what was asked of them. Well done, thy good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master. I'm not sure exactly what that means, but it certainly sounds like something beautiful and good. **Faithfulness results in reward.**

So what happened to the third man? Verse 24-25. Instead of using what was given him to expand the owner's estate, he simply buried the shekels in the ground and forgot about them. Hearing that his master had returned, he dug them up; brushed off the dirt and prepared to hand them back to him. But when he saw the other two men hauling their huge sacks of coins in, he knew he was in trouble. He began thinking up excuses.

Instead of admitting his own laziness and failure to properly care for the valuable coins that were entrusted to him, the servant instead tries to shift the blame back to his master. His excuses sound reasonable enough. I know how much you expect, and because I didn't want to risk losing anything, I did the safe thing. What is wrong with that? At least you got everything back. Besides, if you had given me more to begin with, I might have been willing to take a few more risks. It was not fair that you gave the others more than me. We each should have been given 2.67 talents. We are now beginning to get to the root of the problem.

The master didn't want to hear his lame excuses. The treasure was taken from him and given to the one who had done the most with what had been entrusted to him. It seems that the old saying that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer might have its roots in Matthew 25:29. So, what does this story have to do with the kingdom of heaven?

If you haven't figured it out, the man in this parable who went on the journey is Jesus. He left this earth and entrusted something of immense value to His servants. It wasn't talents of silver or valuable coins but His kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. He left His truth, His grace, His promises and His Spirit, in the care and custody of the church. He has left a share of it to you and I. Knowing each of us personally, knowing our strengths as well as our limitations, He has given each of us a portion of that kingdom to nurture, grow and expand.

One thing this passage of Scripture does make clear is that wickedness- in this case accusing the master of the kingdom of being unjust and unfair- and **spiritual laziness – failing to be faithful in using what God has given us for His glory, can keep us from entering the “joy of the Lord”**. We can either use it or lose it- the choice is ours. The “it” refers to our faith, our skills, our talents and our money.

When it comes to money, we should remember the words of that Meatloaf song from the 70s- *I want you, I need you but there ain't no way I'm ever gonna love you, so don't be sad, 'cause two out of three ain't bad.* Two outta three ain't bad, but one outta three ain't good. That is not just a song but a parable! Two out of three received their reward, and one out of three did not. So, what will you choose to believe? Will it be Biblical Christianity or cultural Christianity, a false gospel that says there will be no accountability in the kingdom of heaven? The question for us to answer this morning is one that Jesus will ask each of us some day. What did you do with what I have given you? How will you answer Him? Will you bring something to lay at His feet or will you come with lame excuses? The choice is ours.... I pray none of us will be embarrassed to answer him. God, as we move into this season of Thanksgiving, help us to remain faithful and grateful for all that we are given! Amen

