

Natalie W. Bell
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Commitment Sunday

The Great Adventure
Matthew 25:14-30

*“For it is as if a man, going on a **journey**, summoned his servants and **entrusted his property to them**; ¹⁵ to one he gave **five talents**, to another **two**, to another **one**, to each **according to his ability**. Then he went away. At once ¹⁶ the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made **five more** talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the two talents made **two more** talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and **dug a hole in the ground and hid** his master’s money.*

*¹⁹ After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘**Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.**’ ²² And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’*

*²⁴ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, **I knew that you were a harsh man**, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. **Here you have what is yours.**’ ²⁶ But his master replied, ‘You **wicked and lazy** servant! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷ Then you **ought to have invested** my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him, and **give it to the one with the ten** talents.*

*²⁹ For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰ As for this worthless servant, **throw him into the outer darkness**, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

At first glance, this story seems to be **about MONEY**.

So, let's say it is.

A talent was a **very large sum** of money in Jesus' day!

It was worth 6,000 denari—a denarius was about one average day's wage.

So one TALENT was about **15 years of daily wages!**

Two talents and five talents would have been almost unimaginable sums of money at that time.

So let's say this is a story about **USING our money**.

What might a wealth management person say about this story?

Ever heard of the Rule of 72?

Me neither, until I read about it this week.

It's apparently about what you have to do to double your investment.

If it has a guaranteed interest rate of 5%, you divide that into 72, and the answer is the number of years it will take to double your money.

So 5% into 72 is 14 ½ years!

John M. Buchanan, Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol 4, pg. 308.

If you want to double your money faster,

You have to be willing to **greatly increase your RISK**.

This is why some say that only one out of ten venture capitalists make it.

The other ones—**lose EVERYTHING**.

So what if the one with five talents and the one with 2 didn't invest their money and double it?

What if they invested it all----and LOST it all?

That would be a more **realistic** story about money, wouldn't it?

What would Jesus say if the first two servants had invested and **LOST** everything?

Well, what if he would have PRAISED them?

Why?

For taking a risk.

For not playing it safe.

For putting themselves out there and trying to do something with what was entrusted to them.

What if the **greatest risk of all is NOT TO RISK at all?**

Now, I don't think this is a story about just money.
I think it can **apply to our money**.
And our time, talent, and faith.

Like all Jesus' parables, it's beyond allegory.
It has layers and layers upon meaning.

So what if this story is **ultimately about LIFE?**

The kind of "**Real Life**" that 1 Timothy 6 describes.

Paul says this to Timothy:

As for those who are rich (which would be all of us)

*They are to **do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,** ¹⁹ thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that **REALLY IS LIFE.***

What if this is a story about finding real life?

About Living.

Investing.

Using whatever you have from God.

And **risking everything---** *to follow Jesus Christ!*

What if this is a story about **NOT giving into FEAR,**

But risking everything

For the great adventure.

The great adventure of following Jesus!

Imagine the story that way.

This master **entrusts his riches generously,** with three servants,

According to their abilities. One gets 5 talents, another two, another gets one.

And they each do something different with it.

The first two invest or trade to 'make more'—doubling their talents.

But the third servant just digs a hole and hides it until the master returns.

Let's think about that third servant with the one talent.

He gets a bad rap, huh?

Even though according to **Rabbinic law,** burying money was considered the safest way to guard against theft.

According to the Jewish laws of the time, he's a smart guy!
He's prudent! He's wise!

Jesus' audience would have likely **identified**
with the third servant and his one talent.

Alyce McKenzie, *The Parables for Today*, Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 2007, pg. 89

But that servant **responds differently to the master**. He says:

*Master, I knew that you were a **harsh man**, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter,²⁵ so I was **afraid**, and I went and **hid** your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.*

The problem is, **where is that accusation coming from?**

The master, who is very wealthy, has been very GENEROUS,
Entrusting huge sums of money with three servants while he goes away.
He goes away, giving them the freedom and space to use those talents.

And then when the first and second servants double their investments,
He praises them, saying:

*Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the **JOY** of your master.'*
The JOY.

So where is the **evidence of the master being harsh?**

Or, is this just **an EXCUSE for the inaction** of the third servant?

The master says to the third servant,

*'You **wicked and lazy** servant! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter?'²⁷ Then you **ought to have invested** my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.*

The third servant reminds me of "**dead money**".

"Dead money" is the term for the millions of dollars in forgotten bank accounts.

Another kind of dead money was discovered in the **ruins of Pompeii**,
when they uncovered bony fingers clutching silver and gold coins.

Talk about truly dead money, after the lava of Mt. Vesuvius covered it.

In the world of faith, there is yet another kind of dead money.

That which is **NOT invested in human life and the kingdom of God**,

like the third servant in the Parable of the Talents. =

I wonder, when YOU hear this story, **who do YOU identify with?**

Which **person** are you?

Do we always take what God has given us, and **use it?**

Do we always invest what God has given us and **double it?**

Do we **give our money?**

Do we **invest our time?**

Or do we play it SAFE?

Do we prefer to just hold onto our money, our gifts, our treasures,

As if they are our own?

Do we prefer to spend it all on ourselves?

Are we AFRAID of what might happen if we give?

If we are generous like the master?

Are we afraid that by giving and sharing and investing,
our time, talent and treasure,

That we will lose something?

So---we just hide our talent in the ground?

Which servant are YOU?

And which one are **we as a church?**

In 1 Timothy 6, Paul writes:

As for those who in the present age are rich, (that would be us, friends) command them not to be haughty or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but rather on God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

*They are to **do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,** ¹⁹ thus **storing up** for themselves the treasure of a **good foundation** for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that **really is life.***

I wonder--

Are we doing good?

Are we **rich in good works, generous, and ready to share?**

Are we **storing up treasures** in heaven, not earth?

Are we **taking hold** of the life that **REALLY IS LIFE?**

What if this is a story about US, investing in life,

And resisting fear and passivity?

What if this is about **courage---and action?**

Are we living courageously, as good stewards?

Are we people of action, when it comes to what God has given us?

That's ultimately what **stewardship is all about.**

It's about using what God has entrusted to us.

Specifically, **our time, talent, and our treasure.**

Jesus spoke a lot about money because of its power in our lives.

We are called to give generously, because we have a generous God.

Because everything we have belongs to God.

We are just stewards of it.

John Wesley's great advice for living was:

Make all you can, Save all you can, Give all you Can.

What if we did that?

Martin Luther said there are three conversions necessary for the Christian:

The head, the heart, and the purse.

But all too often we are like the third servant

Who gives into fear—

maybe because the master was away so long,

or there were too many decisions about that one talent.

What if this is a story about **resisting that kind of fear?**

And **acting courageously?**

What if this is about stepping forward in faith?

Taking a risk, to follow Jesus?

We know this parable is not just about money.

It is also a story about **waiting on the return of Jesus.**

And how we are to live in the **meantime.**

That's where we are today—in the **already and not yet** time.

Jesus has ***already come*** to us.
But he is ***not yet returned*** to redeem us and all of creation.

We live, in the meantime.

So, what if this is a story about HOW we are to live?

And, how we are to RISK everything for our faith.

But, what about the ***harshness of the master towards the third servant?***

He's banished to outer darkness, to weeping and gnashing of teeth! Wow!

Well, what if that's part of Matthew's context?

Matthew mentions Gehenna, and weeping and gnashing of teeth six times!

Matthew speaks frequently about the end of time, and God's judgment.

It's an important theme for him, more so than in the other Gospels.

And, I wonder if Jesus is saying something
more than be afraid of God's judgment—

What if Jesus is saying that ***if you live like the third servant,
you ARE ALREADY in outer darkness?***

Because real life is about ***LIVING***.

Using what we've received.

Investing.

Acting courageously.

What was the sin of the third servant?

Living in Fear. And Laziness.

He was afraid, he lacked faith and courage,
he didn't take any risks.

And the master says he is ***wicked and lazy***.

Are we lazy in our faith?

What about in our generosity?

Or, are we willing to take some RISKS for our faith?

Are we willing to ***invest***—our time, talent, and treasure—in the kingdom of God?

Where the return is amazing? Life-changing?

John Maxwell tells the story of a man in the early 1920s **who gave \$100,000** to help start a Methodist College in Liberia.

Then he lost everything in the 1929 stock market crash.

In the 1960s, the college wanted to find the man who had given them the money to start the college. They found him in the south side of Chicago.

They flew him to Africa to see this school.

He stood in front of hundreds of students, and weeping, he turned to the president and said, **“The only thing I have left, is what I gave...”**

Everything we **keep** we eventually lose, but everything we **give for the Kingdom is something we will always have**”. From Benefits of Lifestyle Stewardship, John Maxwell. In Herb Miller’s Stewardship Nuggets, pg. 48.

What have YOU been given?

And what are you doing with it?

How are we living and using our talents—with **courage, and action?**

Or are we burying what God has given us?

Doesn’t that happen all the time?

Maybe we bury it, because we feel small,

Or fearful.

Maybe we’re jealous, and busy comparing ourselves with others.

Maybe we’re just lazy!

There is a better way---***We can live life fully.***

Real life.

A Life full of generosity, grace, and giving.

And we know that the ***need for a Christian to give***

is far more than any need of a church to receive.

Giving is about us---our hearts, our faith, our lives.

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** today:

We have received so much from our good and generous God.

What will we do with it?

How will we invest it in the kingdom of God,
and not hide our talent?

How will we *do good*,
be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,¹⁹
storing up for a good foundation,
so that we may take hold of the life that *really is life*?

After all, that is the Great Adventure.

And for that, all God's people can say, Amen.