“God’s Kingdom Economy” Matthew 25: 14—30

Jesus said that a master was getting ready to take a long journey. So he called in his servants and distributed his wealth among them. Then he left. And then he came back. And when he came back he called for an accounting, and those who had invested wisely, he rewarded. And the one who did not invest is punished.

Jesus told this story to show us what we ought to be doing while He’s away. This story shows us what Christian readiness—preparedness for Jesus’ return— looks like. It looks like making an investment. It looks like putting our resources of time and availability to work. It looks like giving our best effort to serving Jesus. And, yes, it looks like investing our financial resources in God’s kingdom, so that the work of making disciples would continue. Current events have made this a scarier idea than ever. As investors are warned, investment involves risk and that risk is often significant. In this story Jesus sends the message that as you watch and wait for his return, you have two options: you can use what God has given you to invest in His Kingdom, or you can sit on what he has given you. In each case, the outcome is predictable. Those who invest their “talents” do the right thing and are rewarded. Those who bury their “talents” are condemned!

Let’s zoom in on the story. Scene one opens with the master calling in his servants. He says to them, "I am going to entrust you with my wealth." So he gives 5 talents to one, 2 talents to another, and 1 talent to the third. Talents were a unit of currency, (think of it as a thousand-dollar bill) but it’s not out of bounds to think of “talent” in the modern sense of “ability.” He distributed his wealth among them and said, "While I am gone I want you to be stewards of this wealth."

He is the master. They are the servants. He owns everything. They own nothing. They depend upon him. Now he has called them in and said, "I am going away, and I entrust you with my wealth. You take care of it.” That’s the end of Scene one.

So far, so good. God owns everything. He has entrusted us with the wealth of the Gospel—the wealth of His saving Word in all of its forms. He wants to see what we will do with this treasure. I think we get that.

Scene two: the Master comes back. When He came back, the 5 talent man came in and said, "Look, master. I have taken the 5 and invested them, and now I have 10." "Well done, good & faithful servant," He said. "You have been faithful over a few things. I’ll give you many."

The 2 talent man came in and said, "Look, master. I have taken the 2 talents you gave me and I invested them. Now I have 4." "Well done, good and faithful servant," He said. "Because you have been faithful over a few things, I'll make you a ruler over many."

Then the 1 talent man came in. He said, "Lord, I knew that you were a hard master, and that you reap what you have not sown. So I wrapped up the talent and I buried it in the ground. Here it is. No scratches. No mildew. I've cleaned it up. It is just exactly the way you gave it to me."

The master called him a "wicked, lazy servant," and later, a "worthless servant." And He threw him out into the darkness where people are deeply distressed. End of story.

Does that bother you at all? Make you a little uneasy? You might feel a bit sorry for the one talent man. He didn't steal the money. He didn't embezzle the talent. He just didn't do anything with it. He buried it, kept it safe. And this greatly displeased the Master.

You can bet that if the five talent man had buried his talents in the backyard, he would've been treated the same way —talents taken back, disgraced, sent away. You can also bet that if the one talent man had just taken that humble sum and invested it and turned it into something more, he would have been praised by the Master.

What if the one talent man had invested his talent only to lose it in a volatile market? While common sense would urge us to worry about the risk, the crystal clear point of this parable is that burying the talents God gives us—for whatever excuse we choose—is a bad, bad decision.

God has nothing good to say to the Christian or the church who takes His gifts and buries them to keep them "safe." He has great things to say to the Christian and the church that takes His gifts and looks for new ways to put those gifts to work. He will provide the increase. The success and victories are His. He just needs us to be faithful—to trust Him and to try.

In God's "Kingdom Economy," you don't lose talents by investing them. You lose talents by burying them. With that in mind, let's take a moment to let this sink in.

What "talent" has God given you? Don't say "none." That's an insult to the Master. There is some ability that he has given you that can be an asset to His kingdom. Are you investing it in service to Jesus? Or is it buried right now?

If the Master were to examine me as a pastor and us as a congregation, would he praise us for taking bold and faithful risks? Are we investing our collective talents in a way that is leading an expanding circle of people to Jesus? Do we sometimes bury our talents,

afraid of losing what we've got? Thinking, we tried that once, and it didn't work, so let's just keep this talent nice and safe and wrapped up here in the ground?

If you also recognize this tendency in yourself, I invite you to come with me to the cross of Jesus Christ. I invite you to hear Jesus say, "It is finished—the price for sin is paid in full." Let's go to the baptismal font, where we recall what water and God's Name did to us. It made us His. Let's take our places at the Lord's Table, where his forgiveness is served. These are the places where the talents are disbursed, where the most precious gifts are distributed. Here, the treasury of heaven is opened and offered to us. More valuable than silver and gold, the body and blood of Jesus, given and shed for you, settles your account with God the Father Almighty. In addition, the Holy Spirit has gifted you with skills and interests that are unique to you. He has given you a set of tools that are unique to you. He asks that you use those skills and tools to serve Him. It should come as no surprise that when you do, you will feel useful as never before and you will grow in your faith as never before.

I'll say it once more: In God's "Kingdom Economy," you don't lose talents by investing them. You lose talents by burying them. Let's work together while there's still daylight. Let's invest in God's kingdom while there's still time. When the Master returns, let's be found using what he has given us.