

Matthew 25:14-23 *"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' ²¹ His master replied, '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!' ²² The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' ²³ His master replied, '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!'"*

Invest in the Kingdom

1. What has God given you?
2. How will you invest it in the Kingdom?
3. What payoff can you expect?

I read an article recently that said twenty percent of millennials will die in debt. So one fifth of that generation will never get out of debt their whole lives. I don't know how that compares to other generations. It seems like a high number, but I don't think millennials are the only ones who don't know how to handle money. Many people in all generations haven't learned the discipline of saving and only buying something when they can afford it. They haven't learned to live within their income and invest for their future.

This parable from Jesus is all about investing. Of course, that raises some questions: What do we invest? How do we invest? What's the payoff? What do we invest in? Jesus tells us to invest in the Kingdom.

What do you think of God? In this parable, God is represented by a wealthy man going on a journey. Is that what we think of God? He's distant and disconnected with real life? Do we have the attitude that when the cat's away the mice will play?

Do we see God as primarily an enforcer of rules? We come to believe that everything bad in our lives is punishment from God. We see God as fickle and unsympathetic. As a result we bury our talents out of fear.

That's why we must always begin at the cross of Jesus. For there we see our God is love. We need to stand near the cross and see a God that loved you so much he took hell on himself for you. We need to see that God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son. We need to see our God is not distant and disconnected but is with us always to the end of the age.

In the parable, the man, it says, entrusted his wealth to his servants. That is a good picture of God. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, but he lovingly shares so many blessings with us.

If we're going to let the Word of God have its way with us, we have to do some accounting—what gifts has God given to us? Your house is God's. Your phone is God's. Your car is God's. Your kids are God's. Your abilities are God's. Your financial assets are God's. If you can be the least bit kind and helpful to others, that gift came to you from God. If you can be compassionate when people are hurting, that gift came to you from God. The God who's given you all you have wants to know—are you using all of it, every bit of it, to honor him?

What has God given to you? Everything. Physical life and eternal life. Your body and health. Your mind and your abilities. The first question we asked is "What has God given you?" The simple answer is everything.

The next question is, "How do we invest it for the Kingdom?" This is what we see in the parable: *The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'* It was the last race of the year, the conference championship. He had not done well all year but he was determined to finish near the front. About a third of the way into the race, he found himself in the back, one of the last runners. So, he decided that he was having a hard time breathing. He convinced himself he couldn't finish, so he stopped. He gave up. He made excuses. He told people it was his allergies. But the reality was that if he couldn't be the best, he didn't do his best.

Think about in our lives how often we don't do our best. Think about how, as parents, we sit our children in front of the TV to watch videos because we are too tired to play or spend time with them. Think about all the time

we waste at our jobs, standing around talking, working at only half speed. Think about school. How often do you actually study as hard as you can? How much do you really pay attention in class? Or think about our church. How often don't we stay in bed on Sunday morning and worship at "St. Pillow," rather than come to church? No, we usually don't give God our best. We tend to make excuses like that third servant in the parable.

Sometimes we look around at the gifts others have and we become jealous. Some people are better speakers than me, more creative, funny, tactful and thoughtful and we ask, "Why can't I be more like them?" We envy the gifts of others. But envy is really whining that says God didn't give me the right gifts.

No two of us have the same combination of talents. Jesus has allotted to each of us his or her own unique set of talents, *each according to his ability*. That's an amazing statement. Jesus, the all-knowing Son of God, knows each of us so intimately and so well that he has given each of us exactly what we can handle. If he has not given me great wealth, it's probably because I wouldn't manage it well.

So, I ask again, how do we invest in the kingdom? *"The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'* Their master gave them resources and they were to use these resources for the benefit of the master. And it doesn't matter how much he gives. We are to use whatever he gives us faithfully.

If you're not, there's hell to pay. It's not just churches that get serious about stewardship when the leaves start falling. The Lord is always serious about how we manage what he entrusts to us. Seven times in the New Testament Jesus repeated that hell is a place of eternal darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth for those who rebel and turn away from God. The wicked servant's rebellion was not dealing opioids that people overdosed on, not murder, not addiction to porn or booze—you know what his rebellion was? Doing nothing—not using God's gifts for God's glory. His rebellion was... He didn't invest in the Kingdom.

If you have a nice place to live, a nice car to drive, and maybe even a nice TV to watch, that's not wrong or sinful at all. Those are gifts from God, thank God for them, and *take good care* of what God has given you. But also *take inventory* of every good thing he's given you and figure out the answer to this question: How much of what God has given you have you buried in the ground of self-advancement or self-enjoyment rather than directing every gift you've been given toward the glory of God and the good of others?

In Jesus' story, the servants who win the master's approval are those who go at once and eagerly undertake the responsibility that the master has assigned to them. They don't whine about their assignment, complaining that it is too big or too small. They don't second-guess the master's judgment. They just get to work. (John Brug)

Now, the last question we need to ask ourselves: What's the payoff? Or maybe a better question is: What do you want to remember about your life? Do you want to look back at how well you buried your gifts? When I graduated from the Seminary, my uncle in Wyoming made me a beautiful hunting knife using a deer antler as the handle. I told him later that I didn't take it hunting because I didn't want anything to happen to it. He was upset by that. He made it for me to use, not to just sit there.

God has given us everything we have, not just to sit there or for our own selfish purposes, but for the good of the kingdom of God. People sometimes ask me why I became a pastor. At one time I was accepted into the forestry program at Colorado State University, so why did I become a pastor? Bottom line, I didn't want my life to be a waste. I didn't want it to be about me enjoying myself in the woods. I didn't want it to be about making money. I wanted my life to serve a higher purpose.

And the most amazing thing to me is that some day Jesus would say to me – me, this undeserving, sinful person – that he would say to me, *'Well done, good and faithful servant!'*

In the vast array of gifts that God gives, he has distributed them in various kinds and in various amounts to all of you, because he knows just what you need to be able to serve him well. The only key that will ever turn over the engine and take you down the road of devoting yourself to serving him with those gifts is how much Jesus loves you. In this all-encompassing arena of making faithful use of God's gifts, **what really matters is knowing the Master**. Love is what's in his heart for you. Let it be love that is in your heart for him.