

**“Investment”**  
**Matthew 25:14-27**  
**9/28/08**  
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I was telling one of my friends that I was preaching on Christian giving today, and he asked me, “So you are preaching a ‘Sermon on the amount.’”

Let me make this clear, I am not preaching a ‘Sermon on the amount!’” This is a message about investing.

**Scene 1**

Steven Jobs is the man who founded Apple Computer. Steve decided that John Sculley was the man needed to help him build a completely different kind of computer company, one which would make computers available to every person in the world. But John was comfortably and safely entrenched as president of the Pepsico Corporation, the makers of the soft drink Pepsi. In this position, John had achieved everything that a man could want: power, prestige, public recognition, an enormous salary and a secure future. The thought of a career change requiring a move to the West Coast frightened him. He was concerned about losing pensions and deferred compensation and the adjustment to living in California. He says that "I was overly concerned with what would happen next week and the week after next."

John Sculley knew that he was safe and happy at Pepsico. But he also knew that he had grown to dislike the competitive nature of the business. He also knew how bored he was. Steven Jobs at Apple Computer sensed this. And so Steve finally confronted John with this pointed question. He said to John, "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?" That question penetrated deep into the heart and mind of John Sculley. It changed the course of his life.

He went to Apple Computer and helped it to grow into one of the most successful corporations in the world. Mr. Sculley's life was changed because he took the risk and decided to invest. Was it a risk? Yes. But without it, there would have been no reward.

Like Steve Jobs and John Sculley, Christianity is countercultural when it comes to risk and security and money. Our culture says we have earned everything in our possession. We got it the old fashioned way, we earned it! But Jesus tells us everything we possess belongs to God.

And scholars say today's parable is not just about money, but also about individual gifts. Miriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary says the word "talent" now means ability or natural endowment. "Gifts and graces." But that is not its initial meaning in Greek. 2000 years ago, 1 talent was 15 years wages. A huge amount of silver. The immensity of the sum reminds us of the preciousness of the gifts God has entrusted to our care.

The master gives talents to each according to his ability. Not all of us are as talented as John Sculley and Steve Jobs. Like the servants in the parable, God may have given you 5 talents, or 2, or only 1. You may be called to do 20 things or only 1 thing. Nothing more.

But it is clear in this parable God wants us to double our talents in the service of his reign.

## **Scene 2**

Some years ago in South America, a crew of Peruvian Sailors, headed up the Amazon river came upon a strange sight. It was like a scene from "The Twilight Zone." A Spanish ship was anchored off the coast and all the sailors were stretched out weakly on the deck of the ship. As the Peruvians drew closer, they saw that the Spaniards were in terrible physical condition. They looked the picture of death itself, their lips parched and swollen. They were literally dying of thirst.

"Can we help you?" shouted the Peruvians.

The Spaniards cried out, "Water! Water! We need fresh water!"

The Peruvian sailors, surprised at this request, told them to lower their buckets and help themselves.

The Spaniards, fearing they'd been misunderstood cried back, "No, no we need FRESH water!"

But they received the same reply from the Peruvians to lower their buckets and help themselves. Finally, they decided to trust in the Peruvian sailors. They finally did lower their buckets into the ocean waters and when they brought the buckets on deck they discovered to their amazement fresh water. They had quit trying. There at the mouth of the Amazon river, anchored for days, too far from land to see the coast, but not too far from the mouth of the River, they had fresh water in abundance.

They had quit. In their ignorance, they were resigned to die when all that was needed was to lower their bucket. But they decided to trust the Peruvian sailors.

How much more can we trust what God tells us in scripture!

Two of the servants are pleased to double their talents, and one of the servants is pleased to protect his God given talent by burying it. By hiding his light under a bushel basket.

Two of the servants invest their multiple talents in risky investments. They know that risk is associated with the possibility of higher return. But one servant is risk averse. He does not trust the banker or the master who gave him his talent. He says his master is harsh.

His feeling about investing is like our feeling about the stock market right now. Not a good idea to invest in Wall Street right now. All of us can identify with the cautious servant. So he buries it in the ground for safe-keeping, a common practice 2000 years ago.

Investing in the economy of Wall Street sometimes requires caution. But investing in the economy of God's abundant love always means throwing caution, but not our talents, to the winds. Our culture encourages us to love money and to use people. But Jesus tells us to love people and use money.

There are pockets of defeated people in our country, in some rural areas, and in some inner city ghettos, where defeat is the order of life. No one expects to succeed, and no one expects anyone else to succeed. I think the Spanish sailors were like that. I think the risk averse servant is like that.

But Christians are not like that. Christians have hope. Because Christians trust in God's promises.

### **Scene 3**

Some of us are like the big Presbyterian Church where they took up a special offering one evening for missions. They received in the offering plate \$200.03. When the pastor saw those three pennies in the offering plate he chuckled and said, "We must have a Scotchman here tonight."

From the front of the balcony, a voice called out, "Hoot-man. There are three of us present."

When the offering plate comes around, our culture encourages us to look in our wallets, calculate how much cash we need for lunch this week, and give God the leftovers, the table scraps. But Christians know all our talents belong to God, and we are just caretakers. And because it all belongs to God, one way or the other, we use it all for ushering in God's reign.

The master is pleased with the servants who double their talents. The master says, "Well done, good and trusting servants. Enter into my joy."

But the master is not happy with the one who invests conservatively. He calls him lazy, useless, and even wicked.

So what is the master's problem with the cautious investor? He is not a dishonest servant who is out to milk his master's treasury. There is no hint of fraud, deceit, or scandal. He has no plans to embezzle or swindle. He is also not a philanderer, or a prodigal son out for a fling. What is wrong with being cautious? Discretion and deliberateness are virtues, not vices. But in this parable, virtues do become vices. Prudence and wariness become self protection and restraint. The cautious servant is afraid, and refuses the risk of trading in the marketplace of God's economy. Though his master expresses confidence in him, he judges his master a harsh man. There is no gratitude over the fact that his master trusts him with 15 years wages. So, like the stock market investor, he is risk averse.

But love demands risks. Love is like marriage and parenting. It risks vulnerability.

Like love, the church is also called to take risks. The risk of public expression of the Gospel. The Gospel is Greek for the Good News. And we proclaim it not just in word, but also in deed. You see, we have the option of burying the Gospel, like the risk averse servant, or letting it loose in the world.

What is wrong with being risk averse? Not only does the risk averse servant not trust his banker, he also does not trust his master. Trust is not in his vocabulary. He has no love for his master, just love for security.

I feel sorry for the one talent man in this parable. Not because he had one talent, but because he would not use what he had. We don't all have the same number or quality of talents, but the sky is still the limit on what we can do with them. Those who have been granted talents have obligations.

Investing in God is never a risky investment. This is the difference between investing in the economy of Wall Street, and investing in the economy of God.

### **Conclusion**

When we invite someone over for dinner, we do not give them leftovers. We bring out our best china, and we give them the finest food and drink we have in our house, even if its worth is less than a widow's mite. How much more hospitable are we when we invite God into our lives! We do not give God our table scraps. Christians give back to God the first fruits.

So at the beginning of each year, Christians estimate the talents they will receive for the coming year. Then we calculate what percentage of our talents we are going to give back to God. Then at the beginning of each month, we write a check back to God for one twelfth of that.

Because Christians do NOT give until it hurts. We do not GIVE until it HURTS.  
No. We give until it FEELS GOOD.

When you check your portfolio of investments, many of you have your house, your car, your checking account, and some of you may even have CDs or stocks. I want to suggest to you, with what is happening on Wall Street right now, that all of these are risky investments. So I am going to ask you a question that I do not want you to answer until commitment Sunday, which the session tells us is going to be on November 9<sup>th</sup>. Here is the question I want you to answer on November 9<sup>th</sup>. What percentage of your investments are going to be in God next year?

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's people say ...

### **Call to offertory**

There is a story of a minister in a small town who was having trouble with his collections. So one Sunday he announced from the pulpit: "Before we pass the collection plate, I would like to request that the person who stole the chickens from Brother Smith's henhouse please refrain from giving any money to the Lord. The Lord doesn't want money from a thief."

The collection plate was passed around, and for the first time in many months, everybody put something in.

*A bell is not a bell until you ring it.*

*A song is not a song until you sing it.*

*Life is not life until you live it.*

*And love is not love until you give it away.*

*So, I hope you sing boldly.*

*I hope you dance as if no one is watching.*

*I hope you love as if you have never been hurt.*

*And I hope you make audacious plans, and give your talents back to God boldly.*