

FOLLOWING CHRIST IN MAKING WISE INVESTMENTS

Matthew 25:14-30

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson
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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Investments are risky. Years ago, after my mother died, we invested my share of her modest estate in a mutual fund. We used the services of a financial advisor. He asked us how big of a risk we were willing to take. Well, I hate to take financial risks. I've never bought a lottery ticket. Gambling has absolutely no appeal to me – it's too risky. But we followed our financial advisors advice and invested in something moderately risky. I told Kay – “Look, this was my mother's money. It's money that we hadn't counted on. If we lose it, we lose it. But if we invest wisely the money might grow and help us put our three sons through college.” We forgot about our investment for a few years until Andrew graduated from high school. When we inquired of our financial advisor we were pleasantly surprised to discover that our money had grown 300%. Now what if our financial advisor had said, “I know you and Kay are fiscally conservative. You don't like to take risks – so I put your money in a safety deposit box.” I'd have said, “What? I could have done that myself. Even CDs would have earned a little interest.” I'd have said, “What a worthless advisor.” I'd get rid of him and find someone with a proven record of responsible financial management.

ABOUT INVESTING WISELY
Jesus told a parable that we know as the parable of the talents. A talent was a measure of money – not abilities. A master distributed money to three slaves; ^{\$5000} \$10,000 to one, ^{\$2000} \$5000 to another and, to a third, \$1000. Then the master went away. When he returned he called his slaves to give an account of how they'd used his money. The first and second slaves used their money to make more money. But the third buried his \$1000 in the ground. The stress of this parable falls on the third slave who buried his talent. He says to his master, “I knew you were a hard man to deal with and I was afraid I might lose what you gave me so I buried it.” He was overly cautious, afraid to take risks. Jesus is in affect saying that Christians are called to take risks for God and others. I find at least four lessons in this parable.

First, those of us one-talent servants are prone to resent God. Like the one-talent worthless servant we may think of God as harsh and unfair because he hasn't given us more. We may also hold a grudge against people more gifted than we are. I think of the play, *Amadeus*, the story of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his

principal rival, Antonio Salieri. Without a doubt, Mozart was a ten-talent man. At the age of three he already showed remarkable musical ability. He composed music at the age of five and countless sonatas before becoming a teenager. In his 35 short years he composed 22 operas and 41 symphonies besides many other memorable compositions. The World Book encyclopedia devotes four columns to Mozart. Antonio Salieri isn't even mentioned.

Salieri was a one-talent composer. In *Amadeus*, Salieri is presented as a man of little ability. Faced with Mozart's genius, Salieri realizes his own mediocrity and comes to resent God as well as the more talented Mozart. Salieri did have some talent, however, which he buried out of envy and resentment. He achieved a measure of fame but in the end he lost it all. By the time he died, the world had completely forgotten both him and his music. One talent people often grow resentful of God and of more talented people, so resentful that others have more that they bury the little talent they have.

Secondly, God distributes faith to us in different measure. To some God gives ⁵ ~~ten~~ talents of faith, to others ² ~~five~~, and still others only one talent. Instead of resenting the great faith of others or disparaging our own faith as inconsequential, why not use the little faith God has given us. Let's face it. Some of us weren't given much faith. We're skeptical. We have a hard time believing God hears prayer, loves us, and has come to us in Jesus Christ. There's a danger for people of little faith becoming so cynical that they refuse to exercise the little faith they have. But God expects us to use even our little faith. We can do a lot things with just a little faith. It only takes a little faith to visit someone, or to read a passage of Scripture in the worship service, or set up for the fellowship time after the 8.15 service. There are many things just a little faith can accomplish. And if we serve God with our little faith, our faith will grow.

Dostoyevsky shows us a woman of little faith in his novel, The Brothers Karamazov. She has only one talent of faith. She's very skeptical and contemplates burying what little faith she has. But the saintly monk, Father Zozimov, encourages her to invest her one talent of faith. Don't bury it! Invest it! "Strive to love your neighbor actively. In as far as you advance in love you will grow surer of the reality of God." Bury your faith and you'll lose it. But if you invest what little faith you have in loving others, your faith will grow.

The parable of the talents teaches us a third lesson. Fear paralyzes. So often we're afraid of using the one talent we have. AFRAID TO TAKE RISKS The worthless one-talented servant in the parable says, "I was afraid". It's not a sin or crime to be afraid. There's an episode in the old TV series, MASH, in which a raw teenager recruit is on sentry duty during a particularly long bombing raid. Shaking in his boots, he meets the friendly old colonel. 'Afraid, son?' ask Colonel Potter. 'N-no, just a little nervous', the youngster stammers. 'Oh', replies the colonel, 'if you had any brains, you'd be scared.' It's no sin to be afraid. But fear can paralyze us. Fear may prevent us from doing things we *ought* to do, things we *can* do, things which, if we did them, would greatly enrich our lives and those of others. We may be afraid to pick up the phone and call someone. We may fear reading scripture in front of the congregation or participating in a Nomad dinner. We may fear leading a youth group or inviting neighbors in for a neighborhood Bible study. *Afraid to risk worship*

A fourth and final lesson I've learned is that there are far more one talent people than ~~ten~~⁵ and ~~five~~² talent people. Most of us are one-talent servants of God – but God expects us to use whatever talent God has given us. Nashville music publisher Bob Benson tells about his son getting a bit part in an elementary school play. ~~The boy had hoped for a bigger part, but he got only two lines in the play close to the end.~~ After the performance, Benson wrote in his journal that night: "Mike was not a star, by an means, but he waited faithfully, and when his moment came, he was ready. He said his lines, and he said them well -- not too soon, not too late, not too loud, not too soft, but just right."

Then Benson went on to write: "I'm just a bit player too, not a star in any sense of the word, *but God gave me a line or so in the pageant of life*, and when the curtain falls and the drama ends and the stage is vacant at last, I do not ask for the critic's rave or fame in any amount. My only hope is this - that I can hear from afar the voice of God saying, 'He said his lines and he said them well - not too soon, not too late, not too loud, not too soft. He said his lines, and he said them well!'" (As quoted in *Stories Jesus Told* by John Claypoole)

We may be only bit players in God's great pageant of life but if we're willing to play are part, however small, we too will hear our master say, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things. Enter into the joy of your master."