

## **THE SEASON OF WISE INVESTMENTS**

**Matthew 25:14-30**

**Growing In the Seasons of Life Series**

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How are your investments doing today? We live in a time when there is a lot of emphasis on being wise in planning for the future. With all the economic uncertainties, with many concerned that they have an adequate nest egg for the future, making good investments has become a big business in our country.

At the church in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park where I did my seminary internship, one of the members shared with me how back in 1956 he had invested a few thousand dollars in a small Illinois company known as McDonalds, and how that one investment put his two daughters through St. Olaf College, his son through Dartmouth College, with money left over. Oh, that we could all make investments like that.

In our Bible reading for today from Matthew 25 Jesus tells the familiar parable of the man who entrusted his servants with some of his property; to one he gave five talents; to one he gave two; to another he gave one talent. A talent was a weight in a precious metal and was worth a good sum of money at that time.

The one who had five talents went and invested it, he used it in a positive way and he ended up doubling the amount making five more. In the same way, the man who had two talents also invested his talents wisely and he ended up making two more talents. Yet the one who had only one talent went out and dug a hole and buried it in the ground. He was afraid of using his talent; he did not want to take a risk.

When their master returned he wanted a complete accounting of what these men had done. The first man showed him how he had made five more talents to which the master commended him for his trustworthiness. The second man, in turn, came and showed his master that he had made two more talents; again the master commended him. He told them he would put them both in charge of even more.

Yet the third man told the master he was afraid, and for that reason he hid his talent and had not done anything with it. In response the master was very angry. *"You wicked and lazy slave!"* he said. The master makes it clear that doing nothing was the problem; he should have at least put it in the bank and made some interest. So he takes this man's talent away and sends the man into darkness.

Jesus told this parable to say something about his second coming. Jesus reminds us that he would be going away, that he would ascend back to his Father and that he was going to give each person a variety of different talents and gifts. The important thing for Jesus was not how much the talent, money or gift is, but how it is used and developed.

In this parable Jesus teaches that he is coming again on the last day, that he will ask for an accounting of how we have used our own personal talents and financial blessings. To those who have invested and used these gifts to the fullest (even if they have failed from time to time) even more opportunities will be given. While those who do nothing will lose them all. Jesus warns they may even miss out on eternal life.

There are certain churches today that are referred to as high commitment churches. This means that to be a member of that church every year a person needs to decide whether they want to be a member for another year. These people may need to meet with an accountability partner and discuss if they are giving a tithe (10%) of their income; how regular they have been involved in worship/Bible study; in what ways they have invested themselves in service and witness to others. Commitment is expected for membership.

Now how many of us would be willing to be that accountable to a fellow Christian? Believe it or not, it would be very healthy for us both personally and spiritually to have to be accountable with these things we often try to hide from others. It would also be healthy because Jesus cares deeply about how exactly we are using his blessings. Jesus' parable teaches that the genuineness of our faith will not be judged by simply nice words or intentions, but whether our faith and our lives are invested and multiplied for Christ.

How are your investments doing today? We live in a time, of course, when many of us are not often used to the idea of investing very much in anyone but ourselves. We are mostly concerned about taking care of my needs; my family; my happiness; my standard of living. Many times we even justify this by saying that we are just too busy, too focused on our own financial wants to do something for someone else.

A few years ago I heard Dr. Tony Campolo speak to many pastors and church youth ministers at a special luncheon at Bethel College. Dr. Campolo is a nationally known Christian speaker, author and college professor. In his talk, Tony Campolo talked about his work over the years with youth as a pastor and college professor, as well as being a popular speaker at major youth conferences and events.

He talked about how when youth are having problems, how he has often talked with parents who have said that they just can't understand how their child got into trouble. They talk about how they gave them a wonderful and loving home, the best education, nice electronics and cars, great trips and experiences. Most all of these parents wonder how could this happen to their child.

The problem, according to Tony Campolo, may be just that; they gave them everything and yet they never gave their children the opportunity to live sacrificially for someone else. They never taught them by their own example; by their own involvement in helping others; by their giving; by their own commitment to worship and Christ's mission. These parents never demonstrated what it means to truly invest in others.

Tony Campolo shared that this is one of the reasons why the Mormon Church is growing so quickly in America; their young people are required to give two years of service to the church. The Mormons are very wise, for it is in this service for others that these young people learn about life, they learn that life is never meant to be lived only for oneself. Truly the happiest people in our society are those who have learned how to sacrifice their lives for the sake of others, and for Christ's mission in the world.

God has certainly blessed each one of us here with many talents and gifts; we are all five talent people. And the truth is that God gave us these blessings not just for ourselves, but in order that we will invest in the lives of others and in Christ's church. The reality is that these investments can multiply many times over; as people are given hope; the hungry are fed; as people learn to know Jesus and his love through us.

The problem, however, is that we live today with a consumer mentality, an insatiable appetite that is never satisfied. The lure today is for instant gratification, that we can have things right now without any planning, waiting or asking whether we really need it.

With that attitude no wonder so many have not learned anything about giving, about being good stewards, about giving generously as God has blessed us. As long as my wants and desires come first, and I rationalize that I never have enough, then I can justify keeping most everything for myself.

On the other hand, learning to give generously to the mission and ministry of the church helps us to have a truly happy and full life. It is in giving freely out of love and faith that we are reminded of the fact that everything we have is a gift from God. It helps remind us that money and things are only temporary and do not guarantee happiness. It helps to set us free from thinking that it somehow all belongs to me.

Dr. Kennon Callahan, one of the most respected church consultants talks about how, when we give to Christ and his church, that we should not think about giving to bricks and mortar; to light bulbs or budgets. Rather he says we should always see our giving as an investment in people. The question according to Callahan is not how much the electricity costs, or how much it takes to operate a building, or even how much it costs to pay a staff person.

Rather he says we need to ask how many people are being helped with their specific hopes and hurts; how many are being touched by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This investment in Christ's church, and in his mission to people, pays a great return and multiplies many times over. Jesus says we should not store up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, but we should store up treasures in heaven. In other words, we can't take it with us; but we can send it on ahead by investing now in others.

This morning I have asked four people from Messiah to come forward and share a short testimony of how our church's ministry is touching their lives. These stories, I'm sure, could be multiplied many times over by the ways that so many of us including youth, children and adults have been blessed by this congregation. Our gifts, talents and financial support are definitely an investment in people. (Sharing)

How are your investments doing today? I hope they are doing well. I hope you are planning well for the future. One thing we have certainly seen at Messiah is that there are a number of you who are sharing generously from your income; your investments in land; in farming; in business; in stocks and bonds; in your jobs; in receiving an inheritance. Thanks to each of you as you generously give your investment in people so that more lives will come to know Jesus' life transforming love.

May our prayer be that God will multiply these investments many times over as more and more people are touched by the love of Jesus, and as God's church and kingdom are strengthened. May God richly bless all our investments!