

How do you invest your faith?

P-27A

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

November 16, 2008

^{NLT} **1 Thessalonians 5:1** I really don't need to write to you about how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters. ² For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. ³ When people are saying, "All is well; everything is peaceful and secure," then disaster will fall upon them as suddenly as a woman's birth pains begin when her child is about to be born. And there will be no escape. ⁴ But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. ⁶ So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be sober. ⁷ Night is the time for sleep and the time when people get drunk. ⁸ But let us who live in the light think clearly, protected by the body armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation. ⁹ For God decided to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. ¹⁰ He died for us so that we can live with him forever, whether we are dead or alive at the time of his return. ¹¹ So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

^{NRS} **Matthew 25:14** "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵ to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' ²² And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many

things; enter into the joy of your master.' ²⁴ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?' ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹ For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

In thinking about this sermon, several staff pondered together with me what might be the most fitting and challenging topic title for a passage that is all too familiar to many. So, we came up with 3 or 4 titles that tilt our thinking a bit to the side and challenge us to a deeper and more urgent walk with our Lord in this day and time. The **subject in Matthew today** is about 3 servants each given an investment of talents, worth 15 years of a daily wage each to use on behalf of the master – a lot of money put at risk. 2 of the 3 do so wisely, boldly and aggressively to enhance the master's wealth. The third servant buried his investment, being quite cautious and fearful of losing what little he had to use. He was quite aware of his master's sense of responsibility toward the investments handed out to them. Actually this practice of burying your money was an accepted practice in those days.

These titles came to mind. The one we selected today is “*How do you invest your faith?*” But, it could well have been “*What kind of bailout do you deserve?*” This would be a consideration for the unwise use of the investment given to third servant. Does he deserve to be excused for his lack of action and bad judgment? Should he be excused without strong consequences (read translation for “**harsh**”)? Another title was “*How can you protect your faith from the meltdown?*” Finally, Bruce in his terse manner simply suggested, “*Use it or lose it.*”

All of these titles aim at a certain key point in this passage and in the progression of passages that are leading up to the Passion of Jesus that culminates in execution and humiliation of death on a cross. A **sense of urgency** is growing now. Last week the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids was about what the kingdom of Heaven is like. **Wisdom cannot be given to fools** in a secular or spiritual sense; **but** wisdom of this world is **not the same** as wisdom of the spiritual realm. To **follow Christ** is to be engaged in a folly, a foolish tactic of God. The way of Christ is plain stupid to those who put all their stock in power and politics. In comparison to all other possibilities, submission to suffering and resignation to the cross is ignoble and humiliating, a vacuous defeat to the power of death and evil. **But**, in the **wisdom of God** it is divine strength that is being revealed in the sacrificial

love and grace of Jesus Christ. This is how much God will pay for love. “*For God so love the world that he gave his only begotten son...*” is the singularly most familiar New Testament text that describes God’s love for sinners and God’s hope for our redemption. In a spiritual sense, God intentionally goes **bankrupt** for you and me. God holds absolutely nothing back to save the world. How many of us would dare do that?

This parable signals an urgency to be ready to embrace God’s wisdom that will be revealed soon in the **Passion** of Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane to the Cross of Calvary. Urgency is of essence. Be ready to act now. Be prepared.

Today, the urgency is again stressed and heightens our anticipation of the lengths to which God will go to redeem and to save a broken world. God’s **investment** is great. This parable points to the fact that we will all be given a generous share of God’s investment. The treasure itself may well be nothing physical or material. It may just be the **richness of the gift of “faith”** alone that allows us to see and to embrace and to act as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. The Master will come. There will be accountability, because as Bruce so aptly said, it is a matter of “*Use it or lose it.*”

We humans are a stubborn lot. The same old theme of riches of earth versus the riches of heaven appears daily to challenge our values and our willingness to act for God. It is so important of a stumbling block that Jesus cautions us in the Sermon on the Mount. Praying, giving charitably to the poor, or mourning in public with ashes and oil are not rewards to be seen with pride before others. We cannot store up wealth, money, jewelry, boats, houses, stocks and bonds, plasma TV's or any thing else in all creation. When we die, the riches of earth become meaningless. Worms can eat away at our wealth and thieves can steal it from us or death can deny our pleasure in it. So, Jesus declares and offers divine richness, a wealth of heaven.

¹⁹ *"Do not store up for yourselves **treasures on earth**, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for **yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**..." ²⁴ *"No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You **cannot serve God and wealth**. (Matthew 6:19-24)**

You and I are the earthen vessels that carry this heavenly treasure. What is it? Why is it so valuable? We cannot know or value anything that is from God unless God gives us the richest gift of heaven – **FAITH**. Filled

with this gift of God in grace, we can become victors against all manner of evil and ill will.

Imagine then that God is the Master of this parable today. As the master goes away, he gives much of his own wealth to us to be used for the purposes of the Kingdom of Heaven to be realized today and in this very neighborhood.

Since we are the only ones who are entrusted with this treasure, it makes us pretty important and necessary for God's work, don't you think? What God gives will multiply, if we use this treasure of heaven. Faith grows and doubles and triples as it is demanded upon. So, like the servant given a large portion and one half the size, there is no difference in this treasure of heaven. Faith is faith no matter if it is the size of a mustard seed or of a mountain. God works mightily through us when we employ the rich treasure for the purposes of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

What about the one who is offered the wealth of heaven, faith to be increased for God's glory, but instead, refuses to take the opportunity and the risk to use this treasure of faith? Again, Bruce is right: "*Use it or lose it.*"

When the master returns and asks what each has done, the response of the first two is similar. Each has doubled the investment. Each receives the same exact reward, "*Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been*

trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” That is a reward well worth obtaining – trust and joy. Paul must have relished this reward at the end of his life, after suffering beatings, imprisonment, ridicule, starvation, and rejection. At the end, he can only rejoice in his heavenly wealth. He says in 2 Timothy 1:12 “...*I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.)* Trust is a two way street. God trusts us with this treasure in us as earthen vessels. Our trust in this rich treasure of faith releases us to see Heaven’s calling on earth and to receive all its joys. Paul is not ashamed. You and I are not ashamed. For we know what we believe and that we are held in love until that time. When death does come, Paul anticipates his reward, not in a big signing bonus, but in the joy of being present to his Lord, and he celebrates, “⁷ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* ⁸ *From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness...*” (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

How do we invest our faith then as this rich treasure of heaven? Surely, it must not be buried or hidden, or left unused. Instead, you and I no matter what the portion of faith we possess, we are entrusted with a gift to be used bravely, aggressively, and with holy boldness. We have a chance every

day to do what ever we can in service for God, no matter how little or great, whether there is personal glory or recognition or not. We use it or lose it.

Harsh as that sounds, our faith could shrink up and disappear if we sat on our haunches.

Every day in every year presents something new and challenging. Yet, every year can also present the same old discouraging and anxious responses, when we guard what we don't want to risk. "*Do not be anxious about your life,*" Jesus said. Instead he says that we should "*seek first the Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.*"

The one talent servant knew well that his master demanded his use of the gift entrusted to him; but in fear he chose not to use it. This servant also knew that his master would be harsh. We should also know that we should not take the richness of God lightly. We should not take it for granted. Faith is to be used to open up our lives and to reveal God's love in Christ. This is a great responsibility that comes with this faith. It is not to be for us alone to cherish in order that we might enjoy Heaven; but rather, God expects us to use faith that we might share Heaven on earth to the least, the lost, the lame and the left out. There is an urgency for us to do that. If we wait too long, it may be too late. So, use it or lose it.

We are all anxious about the market place today. We are experiencing large troubling hiccup in the economy. It may even be a terrible recession that will touch all our lives. With this anxiety, investors are leery of advising any of us to take chances and use our money to make money in risky enterprises. But, worse yet, we are so worried that we are using it less and less for anything, even for the work of God. Today, we need to use our faith and all our resources to reveal God's love and grace. It is no time to sit on it. It is high time to get up and use your wealth for its intended purposes.

Is that scary? Probably it is. Is it hopeful? Yes, if faith is what we use and trust as the heavenly riches. Do you want this treasure of earth or of heaven? Consider this:

- There is **No Christian faith** without adventure; God has no use for closed minds.
- God gives us differing gifts – what matters is to allow faith to use our gifts and trust that the results will multiply.
- The reward of work well done is MORE WORD to do. Servants are given greater tasks and responsibilities when the investment succeeds.

- The servant is punished who will not try. This one does not really lose the riches, because he simply did nothing with it.
- Our greatest temptation is to be the ONE TALENT PERSON. This one personifies the deadly sin of sloth or spiritual laziness, saying, “I have so little, I can do nothing with it. So, it is not worth the effort.

That is the message behind a Michangelo’s story. He is said to have been spotted rolling a large stone down the road. It had been flawed and no one wanted to waste their time working with it. People shouted to him, “Why are you laboring over this flawed stone?” Michangelo is said to respond, “Because there are angels in here waiting to be released!”

This is an invitation to you and to me to value the work of Jesus Christ which may not appear so exciting and important to others. It is an affirmation that you and I no matter what we have, we are gifted with the wealth of heaven – FAITH is the divine investment that we may use, each of us. How are you going to invest your gift of faith?