

Can You Spare a Dime? – June 26, 2016

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## Can You Spare a Dime?

St. Matthew 25:14-30

There is a small Texas town, 40 clicks from Lubbock, where a small group met; some 30 business people, oil ranchers, and one preacher. The speaker was a financial guru from a large city. The speaker, knowing a pastor was present, was proud of her knowledge of Holy Scripture. She begins her speech with the "Parable of the Talents" from the Gospel of St. Matthew. Following the reading, she picks up a bill that appears to be money, and waves it at the audience.

*"Do you see this bill?" she asks as she approaches the audience. "On it is printed 'One Million Dollars!' Do you believe that?" she asks. Nope. There is no such bill. But, let's change subjects for a moment, and speak about this 'Parable of the Talents.' Here, talents are not abilities but money."*

One oil man asks the preacher, *"Is that right?"* "Yes." Replies the clergyman. *"You also need to understand that a talent is worth a lot of money,"* the speaker continued. *"And there's something else you might not know,"* the speaker continued, *"It is a way to measure wealth, the largest of Jesus' time. One talent was worth about one million dollars, and that man hid it under his mattress!"*

*One oilman was so enthralled with the speech, thinking Jesus was calling him to invest, he did risk one million dollars. Sadly, for him, the year was 2008. He was later heard to say, "I lost a lot on Jesus!"*

This parable is about investing, and the one-talent man did not do it wisely. In one way or another, we are all searching for security, be it heavenly or earthly. Jesus was speaking about protection here: "Well done . . . Enter into the joy of your master." (v. 21) The potential of permanent presence and friendship with our Master is a pleasure

to contemplate. But, the type of security we have now is irregular. We invest by losing. We benefit by relinquishing just as God did. Indeed, we are asked to 'go all in.'

So, what do we run the risk of here? Why not stash all we have under the mattress? Once, at a disciple group, I asked which commandment this one-talent man violated. The group ruminated. They said, "He appeared to be a good neighbor, the kind who keeps his dog quiet, who does not harm." Perhaps he was a physician. We need, however, someone who does more than maintain the promise of the Hippocratic oath. We need treatment. Someone who will be a risk-taker.

Are you willing to take a risk or do you fear too much? We can see which type of person we are by comparing ourselves to these servants.

Servants one and two take risks to make a profit for the master; the third decides he does not want to lose anything.

Servants one and two are committed to working hard; the third doesn't want to work at all.

Servants one and two accept the relationship with the master; the third rejects it.

The first two let the gift of the master change their lives; the third refuses to do so.

The one-talent man was not a risk taker. He was afraid of his master. He envisioned his master as unforgiving, bad-tempered, and untrustworthy. It is hard to be a friend to someone you do not trust, let alone do not love. Obedience to the 1st Commandment was not a possibility for the one-talent man.

To fear God is not 'to be afraid of,' but 'to be in awe of.' His fear was mean spirited. He pictured his master in such a way as to rule out an active relationship. When he saw his reflection, he saw a frightened person because he thought God did not care for him, God was only interested in how well he performed. Somehow, he believed God

was out to get him. Paranoia sometimes does run deep. Trusting himself to a God like that was not a reality for him. So, he digs a hole attempting to save his life, only to lose it.

Like the talents, how we invest God's grace is up to us. From this parable comes two choices: We can receive God's grace or reject it. And, we can invest ourselves in a life of commitment to Jesus, and lose everything by giving God's grace to others; or not. It's the finest investing we will ever do.

If we believe in God, we will decide to put to use the gifts God has given to us to be active builders in the Kingdom of God.

How is your bottom line? Alleluia. Amen