

God's Investment Tips, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 27081116
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 and Matthew 25:14-30
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“I was afraid.” That was the servant's excuse for not investing the talent that his master gave him. Perhaps we can understand the servant's fear. We are afraid. We are living in difficult and fearful times. The headline on page three in yesterday's newspaper read, “New alarm over economy as retail sales plummet.”¹ The stock market swings wildly up and down, but the overwhelming movement is down. The Dow-Jones average has gone down thirty-five percent in value in the last year. Retirement funds have diminished in value. Those who planned to retire soon are reconsidering and those who have retired recently are going back to work. We can understand the slave's inclination to just bury his master's money so he wouldn't lose it.

Jesus told an interesting parable about investment. The parable is not about the virtues of capitalism and success in the stock market. It is not a justification of those who are rich becoming richer and those who are poor becoming poorer. It is not saying that God will richly bless those who invest wisely. It is a parable about faith. To those who have faith, more faith will be given. To those who have fear, more fear will be given. Trust your faith as well as trusting God.

The opposite of faith is fear— fear of failure, fear of loss, fear of punishment, and fear of peer pressure. These fears paralyze. This is a parable about God and those who serve God. God has given us God's wealth to take care of, to invest and to multiply, not to buy knick-knacks with, but to invest in the future.

This is a parable about risk. The major themes of the Christian faith cannot be understood or lived without risk. Those who save their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives for the sake of the gospel will find them. That is a risk. Our proper judge is God, not our peers. That is a risk.

What do we fail to do because of our fear? We bury our talents. In God's economy, each of us has been given something -- five measures, two measures, or maybe just one measure. Some sing, some sew, some cook, some care, some excel at numbers, some organize, some dream, some write. We tend to compare our skills and buy into the marketplace's assertion that certain capabilities matter more than others. In God's eyes, however, the issue isn't your five versus my two, but whether you use what you have been given.

Whether or not the marketplace honors your gift with payment or applause, do you put your gift to work? Do you stretch yourself and take it farther than you took it yesterday? What do we fail to do in regards to the church because of our fear?

Our church has an opportunity to spread the gospel to townspeople, to students and faculty, and to people of other faiths. Will we bury that opportunity in the ground? The master in the parable, rather than commending the slave for his caution and protection, calls the slave wicked and lazy, and threw him into the outer darkness.

A talent is thought to have been worth about fifteen years of wages in Jesus' day. That is a lot of money! That is half a million dollars in today's money. The first two slaves got pretty good returns on their investments: one hundred percent! The one with the five talents made five more. He doubled his investment. The one with two talents doubled his and got two more. You and I

¹*Burlington, NC Times-News*, page A3

would be pretty happy with that kind of speculation in the stock market. Invest: not for our own personal return, but for God's kingdom here on earth.

What immediately follows this parable is the parable of the last judgment. That is where all of the nations are gathered into two lines, one going to heaven and the other to another place. That judgement is based not on whether or not people confessed Jesus Christ as their personal savior, but on whether or not they fed the hungry, clothed the naked, or visited the sick and in prison, but we'll leave that for next week. Those who feed the hungry and clothe the naked will inherit eternal life. That's a pretty good investment.

God calls us to invest in the faith. We have been given something far more valuable than fifteen years' worth of wages. We have been given the good news of God's love to us in Jesus Christ. What have you done with that treasure? Have you kept it to yourself, pondering it in your heart, or have you spoken it out loud to someone who is hurting?

There are many messages out there in that world contrary to the Christian faith. One message is that you can sell anything to anybody so long as you turn a profit. Jesus' tip is to invest in the faith: speak a word of justice to someone concerned only with profits, a word of care to someone in pain, and a word of peace to someone concerned only with revenge. Proclaim good news in the face of the negative.

We are the stewards of life's talents and possessions, however great or small they may be. As we utilize these talents and things, we must ask the question, "What have I done to prepare for the future: for my future; the future of my children and grandchildren; and the future of the church as the custodian of God's will?"

God calls us to invest in the church. The church has been given to us by God to care for. It is not ours to bury out of fear. Have you told others about your faith, about what the faith community means to you, or about how you have been helped by the cards, calls, prayers of church members when you were in difficulty?

Are you really willing to double your investment? Are you ready to help this church double in size? Will you welcome visitors? Will you invite friends? Will you allow for the changes that will occur in our church life as a result of new members coming?

It is better to double what God has given us than to bury the church in the ground by not sharing it in joy and gratitude. Such hoarding it to ourselves, such protection through burying, will only earn us God's judgment of "wicked and lazy."

Invest in the Christian faith. God calls us to invest in God's mission. All this talk about giving to the church is nonsense unless we are talking about performing God's work. The church is not a club, not a bank, and not an antique shop. The church is given the task of performing God's mission, spreading love, justice, and compassion. So we give our gifts of time, talents and treasures not to support a budget, and not to maintain an organization, but to support a ministry and calling of God.

How much can God depend on you? Let's invest in the faith and in the church so that when it is time to meet God, God can say to us, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."