

## **Matthew 25: 14-30**

**SPEAK, JESUS, WORD OF GOD. SPEAK TO EACH OF US THIS MORNING. HELP US LAY ASIDE ANY FEARS AS YOU EMBOLDEN US TO RISK AND LIVE OUT OUR FAITH AS A HOLY ADVENTURE. AMEN.**

**WHO DOESN'T LOVE A GOOD FIREWORK SHOW ON THE 4<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY AND ESPECIALLY THE FINALE. EVEN IF PARENTS HAVE TO COVER THE EARS OF THEIR BABIES, EVERYONE LOVES THE FINALE WHEN THE FIREWORKS START GOING OFF IN RAPID-FIRE SEQUENCE FILLING THE AIR WITH SPARKLES AND COLORS AND LOUD BOOMS OF NOISE...BAM, BAM, BAM, BAM. IT'S BIG AND LOUD, AND IF YOU DON'T LIKE LOUD NOISES, A FIREWORKS FINALE CAN FILL YOU WITH BOTH EXCITEMENT AND A GOOD DOSE OF FEAR.**

**IT APPEARS THAT MATTHEW IS SETTING OFF HIS OWN FIREWORKS FINALE WITH THIS PART OF THE GOSPEL. AS WE'VE HEARD OVER THESE PAST WEEKS, MATTHEW STRUCTURED HIS GOSPEL SO THAT JESUS' TEACHING MINISTRY ENDS WITH FOUR DRAMATIC PARABLES. EACH ONE DRIVES HOME THE DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP AS WE AWAIT JESUS' RETURN: BAM, BAM, BAM, BAM. THESE PARABLES ARE BIG AND EMOTIONALLY EARSPLITTING, AND IF YOU DON'T LIKE THINKING ABOUT THE LIFE OF FAITH AS DEMANDING, THEN THEY MIGHT FILL YOU WITH A STRONG DOSE OF FEAR. IN FACT, YOUR FIRST REACTION IN HEARING THEM MAY BE TO PUT YOUR HANDS OVER YOUR EARS TO MUTE THE THEOLOGICAL IMPACT.**

**LOOK AT TODAY'S PARABLE. FIRST AND FOREMOST, LET'S DEAL WITH THE WORD *TALENT*. IN OUR DAY THE DEFINITION OF A TALENT IS A NATURAL APTITUDE, A SKILL. BUT IN JESUS' DAY, A TALENT WAS A FINANCIAL DESCRIPTION. ONE TALENT WAS EQUAL TO WHAT A LABORER MIGHT EARN IN 16.5 YEARS OF WORK.**

**SO TRANSLATING THIS PARABLE TODAY MIGHT SOUND LIKE THIS: A MAN, BEFORE GOING ON A JOURNEY, SUMMONED HIS SERVANTS AND ENTRUSTED HIS PROPERTY TO THEM. TO ONE, HE GAVE TWO-AND-A-HALF MILLION DOLLARS. TO ANOTHER, HE GAVE ONE MILLION DOLLARS. AND TO A THIRD, HE GAVE FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS.**

WHEN WE MAKE THIS TRANSLATION LEAP, WE QUICKLY SEE THAT WHEN THE MAN GIVES THE SERVANTS FIVE TALENTS OR TWO TALENTS OR EVEN JUST ONE TALENT, HE IS ACTUALLY BEING EXTREMELY GENEROUS WITH HIS MONEY. I IMAGINE AS JESUS TOLD THIS PARABLE TO HIS ORIGINAL LISTENERS THAT KIND OF GENEROSITY STRETCHED THEIR IMAGINATIONS. A MASTER TRUSTING HIS SERVANTS WITH THAT KIND OF MONEY WAS NOT A NORMAL STORYLINE. THAT WAS NOT HOW THE WORLD WORKED. THE LISTENERS HAD TO BE STUNNED IN THE FACE OF THE MASTER'S EXTRAORDINARILY TRUSTING AND GENEROUS ACTIONS.

THE FIRST SERVANT TAKES THE MONEY TO THE MARKET, TO A WEALTH MANAGEMENT FIRM, AND INVESTS IN HIGH-RISK VENTURES. THE SECOND SERVANT DOES THE SAME THING, PUTS THE MONEY TO WORK AT HIGH RISK. BOTH DO VERY WELL. BOTH REAP THE REWARDS. WHEN THEIR MASTER RETURNS, HE IS VERY PLEASED. "WELL DONE," HE SAYS. THEN HE PROMISES THAT THEY WILL RECEIVE MORE RESPONSIBILITY IN THE FUTURE.

THE THIRD SERVANT TAKES A VERY DIFFERENT APPROACH WITH HIS MONEY, HIS ONE TALENT. HE DIGS A HOLE IN THE GROUND AND PUTS ALL THE MONEY IN THE HOLE FOR SAFE KEEPING. IN A TIME OF STOCK-MARKET DECLINE, THIS MAN LOOKS VERY WISE. HE IS NOT A BAD MAN. HE IS PRUDENT AND CAREFUL; A CAUTIOUS INVESTOR. HE IS NOT ABOUT TO TAKE CHANCES WITH THE MONEY. IT IS ALL THERE, EVERY PENNY OF IT, WHEN HIS MASTER RETURNS. HE IS PROUD OF HIMSELF. "HERE IT IS. ALL OF IT, SAFE AND SOUND." TO BE FAIR, ACCORDING TO RABBINIC LAW, BURYING MONEY WAS THE SAFEST COURSE POSSIBLE. IF YOU WERE ENTRUSTED WITH SOMEONE'S MONEY AND YOU BURIED IT, THEN YOU WERE NOT LIABLE FOR ANYTHING THAT MIGHT HAPPEN TO IT. IT WAS A NO-RISK, SAFE THING TO DO. BUT WHILE HIS BEHAVIOR MIGHT HAVE BEEN SAFE, IT STARKLY CONTRASTS WITH THE BEHAVIOR OF THE OTHER TWO. SO, WE HAVE TO WONDER WHY THE ONE-TALENT SERVANT ACTED SO DIFFERENTLY. WHY DIDN'T HE FEEL THE FREEDOM TO TAKE RISKS AND TO VENTURE OUT BOLDLY?

I BELIEVE WE HEAR A CLUE AS WE LISTEN TO HOW THAT SERVANT RESPONDED TO THE MASTER'S RETURN: "I KNEW YOU WERE A HARSH MAN, REAPING WHERE YOU DID NOT

SOW, AND GATHERING WHERE YOU DID NOT SCATTER SEED; SO I WAS AFRAID, AND I WENT AND HID YOUR TALENT IN THE GROUND. HERE, HAVE WHAT IS YOURS.” LET’S PAUSE AND THINK BACK. GIVEN WHAT WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN IN THIS STORY, DOES THAT CHARACTERIZATION OF THE MASTER SEEM ODD TO YOU? NOWHERE IN THE STORY DO WE SEE THE MASTER PAINTED AS A HARSH MAN.

THIS SERVANT’S PERCEPTION OF HIS MASTER SEEMS CLOUDY. THE OTHER TWO SERVANTS FELT FREEDOM, WHILE ALL HE FELT WAS CAPTIVITY. THEY SAW GENEROSITY, BUT HE SAW A TRICK. THEY VENTURED OUT BOLDLY, RISKING IT ALL FOR THE SAKE OF A GREAT RETURN, BUT HE DECIDED TO PLAY IT SAFE, CONCERNED ONLY WITH SELF-PROTECTION AND NOT BEING HELD LIABLE. THE TWO SEEMED TO BE BUOYED BY TRUST, BUT HE SEEMED ABSOLUTELY IMMOBILIZED BY FEAR. AND UNFORTUNATELY FOR HIM, HIS FEAR FINALLY ENGULFED HIM. THIS MAN GOT THE TYRANT MASTER HE BELIEVES IN.

DOES THIS ENDING CATCH YOU OFF GUARD? AFTER ALL, THE MAN WAS ONLY PLAYING IT SAFE, MAKING SURE HE WAS PROTECTED. WE CAN CERTAINLY UNDERSTAND THAT, CAN’T WE?

MAKES ME WONDER HOW IT WOULD HAVE TURNED OUT IF THE FIRST TWO SERVANTS HAD PUT THE MONEY IN A HIGH-RISK VENTURE AND LOST IT ALL. JESUS DID NOT TELL IT THAT WAY, BUT I CANNOT BUT IMAGINE THAT THE MASTER WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN HARSH TOWARD THEM, AND MIGHT EVEN HAVE APPLAUDED THEIR EFFORTS. THE POINT HERE IS NOT REALLY ABOUT DOUBLING YOUR MONEY AND ACCUMULATING WEALTH. IT IS ABOUT LIVING. IT IS ABOUT INVESTING YOUR LIFE. IT IS ABOUT TAKING RISKS. IT IS ABOUT JESUS HIMSELF AND WHAT HE HAS DONE AND WHAT IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN TO HIM AS HE TOLD THIS STORY DURING THE LAST DAYS OF HIS LIFE. MOSTLY IT IS ABOUT WHAT HE HOPES AND EXPECTS OF HIS DISCIPLES AFTER HE IS GONE. IT IS ABOUT BEING A FOLLOWER OF JESUS AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE FAITHFUL TO HIM, AND SO, FINALLY, THIS STORY IS ABOUT YOU AND ME.

WITH THE DRAMATIC BAM, BAM, BAM, BAM OF THESE LAST PARABLES, JESUS IS TRYING TO HELP THE DISCIPLES IMAGINE HOW THEY ARE GOING TO LIVE IN THE WORLD, IN THE

EVERYDAY ROUTINE AND CHAOS, AS BOTH DISCIPLES AND AS COMMUNITY, UNTIL THE TIME HE COMES BACK TO FINISH MAKING ALL THINGS NEW.

ONE THING WE SEE IN THIS PARABLE IS THAT FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN WAITING IS NOT PASSIVE. IT DOES NOT LOOK LIKE SIMPLY PLAYING IT SAFE, BURYING YOUR FAITH IN A HOLE BECAUSE YOU ARE SCARED. THIS PARABLE ILLUSTRATES A WAITING THAT INVOLVES VENTURING OUT INTO OUR COMMUNITIES, INTO THE WORLD, CONFIDENT THAT GOD REALLY IS AS GOOD AS JESUS SAYS. FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN WAITING INVOLVES BOLDLY TAKING RISKS; BEING WILLING TO FAIL; EYES WIDE OPEN, STANDING ONLY ON GRACE, FREELY REACHING OUT INTO THE WORLD PAST ALL FEAR, MOVING BEYOND THE TEMPTATION OF MERE SELF-PROTECTION.

THIS IS PRECISELY WHY WE MIGHT WANT TO PUT OUR HANDS OVER OUR EARS TO MUTE THE IMPACT, BECAUSE THIS PARABLE COULD CAUSE US TO GET HONEST ABOUT HOW WE BEHAVE AS PEOPLE OF FAITH. WHAT ARE WE REALLY WILLING TO RISK IN DISCIPLESHIP...NOT JUST HERE WITHIN THE CONFINES OF OUR CHURCH, BUT OUT IN THE WORLD? ARE WE GOVERNED BY WANTING TO PROTECT OURSELVES, PLAYING IT SAFE WITH WHAT WE SAY OR DO OR HOW ABOUT WITH WHAT WE GIVE? HOW BOLDLY ARE WE LIVING AS CHILDREN OF GOD?

THE GREATEST RISK OF ALL, IT TURNS OUT, IS NOT TO RISK ANYTHING, NOT TO CARE DEEPLY AND PROFOUNDLY ENOUGH ABOUT ANYTHING TO INVEST DEEPLY, TO GIVE YOUR HEART AWAY AND IN THE PROCESS RISK EVERYTHING. ONE OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH'S SEVEN DEADLY SINS WAS SLOTH..MEANING NOT CARING, NOT LOVING, NOT REJOICING, NOT LIVING UP TO THE FULL POTENTIAL OF OUR HUMANITY, PLAYING IT SAFE, INVESTING NOTHING, BEING CAUTIOUS, DIGGING A HOLE AND BURYING THE MONEY IN THE GROUND.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER SAID THAT THE SIN OF RESPECTABLE PEOPLE IS RUNNING FROM RESPONSIBILITY. BONHOEFFER TOOK HIS OWN RESPONSIBILITY SO SERIOUSLY HE JOINED THE RESISTANCE AND HELPED PLAN AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON HITLER'S LIFE. HIS SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY COST HIM HIS LIFE.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THIS PERSONALLY, IN TERMS OF HOW WE LIVE? JESUS' WARNING IS THAT THE OUTCOME OF PLAYING IT SAFE—NOT CARING, NOT LOVING PASSIONATELY, NOT

**INVESTING YOURSELF, NOT RISKING ANYTHING....IS SOMETHING AKIN TO DEATH, LIKE BEING BANISHED TO THE OUTER DARKENESS.**

**NOW FOR MOST OF US, OUR PERSONAL FAITH, HAS NOT SEEMED LIKE A HIGH-RISK VENTURE. FAITH HAS SEEMED TO BE A PERSONAL COMFORT ZONE. FAITH, MANY OF US THINK, IS ABOUT PERSONAL SECURITY, HERE AND IN THE HEREAFTER. FAITH, WE THINK, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN TAUGHT, IS GETTING OUR PERSONAL THEOLOGY RIGHT AND THEN LIVING A GOOD LIFE BY AVOIDING BAD THINGS. OUR FAITH, IS A PRETTY TIMID, NONRISKY VENTURE.**

**HERE JESUS INVITES US TO BE HIS DISCIPLES, LIVE OUR LIVES AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE BY INVESTING THEM, BY RISKING, BY EXPANDING HORIZONS OF OUR RESPONSIBILITIES. JESUS WANTS US TO FOLLOW HIM...TO BE BOLD AND BRAVE, TO REACH HIGH AND CARE DEEPLY.**

**AND WHEN WE GET AFRAID, WHICH WE WILL, AND WHEN WE ARE TEMPTED TO SHRINK BACK, WHICH MIGHT HAPPEN, WE CAN REMIND EACH OTHER WHO IS TELLING THIS PARABLE. THE BIGGEST RISK TAKER OF ALL. JESUS CERTAINLY COULD HAVE PLAYED IT SAFE, BURYING HIS MISSION IN A HOLE IN THE GROUND, LOOKING OUT ONLY FOR HIMSELF. HE COULD HAVE STAYED IN THE BACKGROUND. BUT HE DIDN'T. JESUS STEPPED RIGHT OUT THERE, RISKING HIS LIFE FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD. HE STOOD UP FOR THOSE WHO HAD NO VOICE. HE FED THE HUNGRY, BEFRIENED THE OUTCAST, HEALED THE SICK. HE CALLED ALL PEOPLE TO REPENTANCE AND NEWNESS. JESUS EMBRACED THE FREEDOM GOD GAVE HIM, BECAUSE JESUS KNEW THAT GOD WAS EVEN MORE TRUSTWORTHY, EVEN MORE FAITHFUL, AND EVEN MORE GENEROUS THAN WE HAVE IMAGINED. BUT LET'S NOT KID OURSELVES: TAKING THOSE RISKS LED JESUS STRAIGHT TO THE CROSS, INTO THE GRIP OF DEATH. BUT TAKING THOSE RISKS ALSO LED HIM STRAIGHT THROUGH DEATH, BREAKING ITS GRIP AND POWER ONCE AND FOR ALL, BRINGING HIM BACK INTO THE FULLNESS OF GOD. JESUS, OUR SAVIOR, WAS NOT IN LIFE FOR SURVIVAL OR SELF-PRESERVATION. HE WAS IN IT FOR THE KINGDOM, TO LIVE IN THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S REIGN UNTIL THE TIME WAS RIPE AND ALL PEOPLE COULD SHARE IT TOGETHER.**

**BAM, BAM, BAM BAM! MAY WE GROW BOLDER AND BRAVER IN OUR FAITH....REACHING  
HIGHER AND CARING MORE DEEPLY! WHO'S IN?**