



July 1, 2012
Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

It's Your Call: No Whining Matthew 25: 14-30

Do you see this? *[Hold up irrigation part.]* You can get it at any local hardware store. How much do you think something like this would cost? How about \$200! I installed this to drain the water from my irrigation system in the winter time. Turned out it drains all the time and I didn't realize it until I got a huge water bill. Of course, I had no idea where the leak was in my system, so I had to hire a leak finder with his fancy listening devices. That cost me \$175! I dug it up, replaced it with a 99 cent plug, and it was done... but not until I had dumped \$200 into a hole in the ground.

How irritated do you imagine that made me? Very irritated! I don't like dumping money down a hole. Jesus didn't like it, either, as we discover from our text this morning.

[Read Matthew 25: 14-30]

Last week Pastor Jeremy reminded us that the call of God precedes our gifts and talents. God doesn't call us because we are so remarkable. God calls us... and then He gifts us to do what He intends. This morning's parable picks up right there. A man prepares to go on a long journey. Before he goes, what is the first thing he does? He calls his servants to him. Then what? He entrusts his property to them... and it is a lot of property. Think about what you make in a year. Now, multiply that by 20. Got that number? That was one talent. A talent was equal to about 20 years' wages.

The master, before he leaves on his trip, entrusts a huge sum of money to three servants according to their individual abilities. One gifted servant was given 100 years' wages, another 40 years' wages and a third, 20 years' wages. And then, the master left.

How many business people do we have here? How many of you have ever applied for a business loan? Was your application process harder than this? What do you notice about the master's instructions on how his fortune is to be invested? There are none! He gives them no instructions! Not even, "Go make a profit!" He just expects that they will... and off he goes.

You know, sometimes businesspeople feel as if their career—which is to produce a product, make a profit and create jobs—is not really a “spiritual enterprise.” Certainly not as spiritual as what a preacher does, for instance. Well, it is worth noting here that Jesus uses a successful, entrepreneurial, business enterprise as a positive spiritual example of someone who is obeying the call of God. Business folks, take note! Your work can be just as spiritual as preaching a sermon! The parts of this story are clear. Who is the master? (Jesus) He comes to earth, calls His disciples, saves them, gifts them... and leaves for a time. While He is gone, He expects His disciples to make a spiritual profit on their gifts. And one day, he will return... and do what? Settle up! He will demand an account of every one of His called, saved and gifted children... regarding what they did with what they had.

That’s what happens in the story. The master returns and demands an account. Mr. Five-Talent proudly reports how he invested his master’s money and doubled it. Listen to the praise he receives: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” You can almost feel the proud glow of Mr. Five-Talent rising off the page, can’t you? He just beams!

Then the master turns to Mr. Two-Talent and asks the same question. He gets the same response and offers the same praise. Take note of this... especially those of you who consider yourself modestly talented: the master’s words of approval are exactly the same for both servants. He doesn’t care about the amount that has been made. He cares that each servant has been faithful with what he was given. Ahhh, but now comes Mr. One-Talent... and the whining. What did he do with the fortune entrusted to him? He buried it! He put it in a big tin can and buried it in the back yard. He didn’t invest the money... didn’t put it to work, didn’t even loan it out to some gentiles to make a little interest. Nope. He ran off, dug a hole and buried it. And why? Whose fault was it that he didn’t risk investing that money? It was the master’s fault! Listen to his horrible description of his master:

“I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.”

What kind of a man was the master, according to this servant? A hard one... and apparently, a crooked one, too. He steals the fruit that others have planted... harvests wheat that others have sown. He is unscrupulous and mean; and the safest thing to do with such a man’s money, obviously, is to bury it! He didn’t dare anger such a master by losing his money.

How many of you wish that you’d buried your money in a hole about 5 years ago? We certainly understand the dangers of investing, don’t we? Perhaps we are more sympathetic to this guy than others might be. At least there was no loss of principal, right? Surely the master will appreciate his prudence, right? Not hardly.

“You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should

have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents... And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

We get the idea that if the servant had told the master, "I invested your money in Facebook. I thought it was a sure thing, but I lost 20%." You sense that the master would have replied, "It's okay. I'm proud of you for trying." Failure wasn't the worst thing a servant could be accused of. What was the worst thing? Unwillingness to risk! Because the servant wouldn't even try—because the servant took the gifts entrusted to him and stuck them in a hole rather than trying to do something good with them—the master was ticked. How ticked? "...throw that worthless servant ...into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." When Jesus uses that kind of language, what is he talking about? Hell! The unwillingness to risk our gifts—gifts that have been entrusted to us by our master, however few or many—our unwillingness to put those gifts to risk is damnable, according to this parable.

But is that really what makes the master maddest? That he didn't get a return on investment? No. What angers the master most is that his servant doesn't know him. The other servants don't think him a hard, unscrupulous man. They understand that they have permission to risk, to dare great things in the face of failure, because they know the master's heart. They know that he is good and generous and trusting. How else can you describe someone who hands over a fortune without so much as a word of instruction?

But not Mr. Whiner... his laziness, fear, risk-aversion... all arise out of the fact that he does not really know his master's heart. So when he is entrusted great gifts to do great things, he chooses instead to hide them in a hole... to live in resentment towards others who have more and to whine about it.

This is not, of course, a lesson in investing and saving. That will come next January when our church goes through *Financial Peace University*. No, this is a lesson about our theme, which is "calling". Remember, there are two calls: Our primary call is to be in relationship with God. He who knew us, formed us, gifted us and saved us, calls us to be in relationship with Him. Every Christian shares that same primary call, the call to intimate relationship with the Father. When we answer that call—when we draw near to God, when we come to know His voice and His heart—then we receive our secondary call: to put our gifts to use in a particular way for a particular job for which we were particularly created. Not all of us have the same gifting. Some are extraordinarily gifted, others less so, but all of us have gifts and God expects that we would know His heart, trust His call, and put our gifts to use for the sake of His kingdom.

There are too many of us who are not willing to take the risk... too many of us who resent God or resent others and choose to bury our gifts in a hole and whine about how unfair life is. Maybe your issue—like this story—is financial. You resent God and don't trust Him. You think He is as stingy as you are, so you bury your money and hoard it instead of learning to give. Isn't it interesting that the very word that used to mean money—talent—now means gifts and abilities. Maybe you don't think you are that special, don't have anything to offer, so you bury your talents in a hole and refuse to use them. Every time a request comes for help in the church or community, you just ignore it. Just hoard your talents in your little dirt hole. Or maybe your marriage doesn't seem like much to you. If you took a risk—if you gave counseling or romance or servanthood a try—you might be able to produce a marriage that is life-giving. But it's too risky. And so... you just bury your gifts in a hole and hope for the best.

If that describes you, what is the solution? Climb back into that hole; pull those gifts out and put them to work! Take a risk! Will it be scary? Maybe, but not as scary as this is. *[Image]* Do you know what this guy does for a living? He is a snake hunter. His job is to wrap an animal skin around his arm, allow another man to lower him into a hole, find a python inside, entice it to attack his arm, and then when the snake has his mouth over the guy's arm, the friend holding his legs pulls him out. And voila! Snake shish kebab! For you claustrophobics who hate snakes, this is your dream job, isn't it?

If you see God as a stingy, harsh taskmaster—one who cannot be trusted to care for you and bless your risk-taking—it could be that you have buried your gifts and talents and that you are refusing to even try to give or serve or love or risk... refusing to follow God's call because you really do not know His heart.

So what should you do? Climb into that hole you've dug, pull out those gifts that have been moldering in there and put them to use while you still can. Trust God! Take a risk! Give it a try! You will never fulfill the call of God upon your life if you don't discover the heart of the Father who doesn't care if you try and fail; He only cares that you trust Him and try.

This morning we come to the meal that reminds us of the power of risk-taking. Jesus knelt in Gethsemane and begged God to spare Him what lay ahead. And yet, He knew the Father's heart, entrusted Himself to Him believing that the risk of death and pain would be worth the return of forgiveness and eternal life. As you consider what you have squirreled away in the hole of your life, think about the Master who risked it all so that you might really know the Father's heart.

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. Pastor Mark pointed out that the parable raises several qualities that make for great servant-leaders: responsibility, initiative, risk-taking, entrepreneurship. Where do you find those qualities in this story?
 2. Why was Jesus so upset with the third servant? After all, in these recent years, anyone who could hold on to their principal would be considered a shrewd investor. What is Jesus after?
 3. As you consider the character qualities that Jesus affirms, how would you grade yourself in each of these areas as you consider God's call upon your own life.