

A Formula For Joy – Parable of the Talents

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A parable is a story, rich in meaning and metaphor

Jesus used parables all the time to teach people things

Because stories that use metaphor go deep, have multiple meanings, and actually keep people's interest.

It was very common for rabbis to use stories in teaching or parables.

We are in a series exploring the parables of Jesus – called the Moral of the Story – because all of Jesus' stories tell us a little bit more about what God is like.

And today we learn about

A rich man who delegates the management of his wealth to his servants,

Much as investors in today's markets do.

He gave five talents to one,

Two to another

And one to another.

This parable has been used by preachers to say...give more, use your gifts. God has given you all different amounts that you have so be faithful with and invest it in the kingdom!

Which I do think is the general point of this story. So often we don't use our gifts...or even our gift cards...Did you know...

According to Consumer Reports a few years ago, one out of every five gift-cards went unused the previous year. This represents nearly a billion dollars in unredeemed cards.

The Leading Reasons Were:

A shortage of time: 50 percent

Not finding what was wanted: 37 percent

Lost the card: 14 percent

The card expired: 12 percent

I think these are some of the same reasons we don't use the gifts God has given us...

But I want to focus on

The guy with one talent who dug a hole in the ground for the money for a minute...

You know, the strangest thing happened this past week – although being in the ministry you begin to expect things like this to happen on a regular basis, and they actually do...

I was meeting with someone who does not go to this church
Someone who has no idea what we do here on Sundays and who certainly has no clue that we are in a series on Jesus' parables

She came to discuss some issues she was having and when it was all over we prayed

I was getting up to open the door and she said, "Pastor Kim, can I just ask you one question."

"Sure" I said

"Can you explain a scripture to me?"

"I'll do my best," I said knowing that this individual was a very deep Christian and knew the Bible well. I was sure it was going to be a stumper. Do you know what the scripture was that she wanted explained, just this past week?

It was the end of this very parable that had been scheduled for today
And she had no idea. And do you know what she wanted to know?

She wanted to know why the Master was so "mean" to the servant who was scared, and buried his talent in the ground.

Did any of you squirm a little at that part at the end where the Master is reaming out his servant.

Feel a little uncomfortable with it?

Now this woman in my office had figured out that the Master, in this parable, represented God, and it didn't make sense that the Lord would be so harsh to someone like that.

So we talked about it, and I told her that I was preaching on this today and she just shook her and grinned.

Now

When you read difficult passages like this, look deeper. Do a little research. Because what is happening here, between the Master and the servant is something quite extraordinary.

The late Kenneth Bailey, renowned Middle East scholar tells the amount that a talent was worth back in Jesus' day

Does anyone want to take a guess at how much one talent was worth for a day laborer in terms of how long they would have to work to earn it?

Anyone?

15-20 years worth of work for a day laborer in Jesus' day would be equal to just one talent.

So the guy that got 5 talents had an amount of money that he couldn't even fathom making, even if he worked every day for his whole life!

And the same with the guy who had 3 talents, and even the one who had 1 talent – that was up to 20 years of hard labor.

Can you imagine entrusting all this money to servants? That's a pretty big chunk of money that required a huge amount of trust that the Master had in them.

It wasn't like the Master was going away and said to them "here's 50 bucks – do something with it". This was a fortune!

What is Jesus saying God is like, by using such an extravagant amount of money in this parable?

An over the top generous God who gives us more than we can even ask or think

And then he trusts us with it...

And then trust us with it.

Trusts *that we will know him well enough* to use what he has given us... the way that he would use it.

When the first two servants report back to the Master, it is important to note what the master compliments them for.

He doesn't compliment them on how *much* they made.

What he commends is their trustworthiness, their faithfulness...

I gave this to you and you did what I would have done with it – and you didn't give up.

Back in Jesus' day,

Roman slave holders often would give their slaves certain responsibilities like this – with goods, money and land - but they did not just expect the slaves to simply follow instructions – like how we do when we buy something at IKEA and read instructions for assembly on a sheet of paper.

No. Not like that.

The slaves were expected to take on the very mind of their master, and do the things they knew their master would want. To think as their master would think and act accordingly.

So, it wasn't just faithfulness in following commands or instructions.

The point in managing a master's wealth, was to become a clone of the master.

There may be some here who are old enough to remember a great football coach whose name was Bud Wilkinson. He is in the college football hall of fame...

Bud Wilkinson coached the Oklahoma Sooners from 1947-1963.

In the 1950s, the Oklahoma Sooners won three national championships and that team still holds the record for most games in a row won. 47 games!

How they accomplish such an amazing record?

What Bud Wilkinson did was this.

He would take the quarterback out in the off-season and together they would go over and over and over the plays, and all the formations.

And the saying was that when the quarterback walked onto the field in September to start the college football season,

he walked onto the football field in his body, but with *Bud Wilkinson's mind*.

With Bud Wilkinson's mind.

One of the scriptures states of Christians that, "we have the mind of Christ."

We know who he is, we know what he would do, and we operate faithfully according to that mind. The more time you spend with Jesus, the more like him you become.

And the more naturally you ask yourself that age old questions, What would Jesus do?

Over time it becomes easier and easier to figure that one out.

I knew a couple who had been married for a long time, and they knew each other so well, that they barely spoke. They loved each other, but they barely spoke, not because they were angry, but because they could reach other's minds.

The husband, sitting on the couch just looked up at his wife, and said nothing, - and she goes – Oh okay, I'll get you a blanket.

Then another time we are sitting on the porch, and she is just looking at some rose bushes, and he says, “Oh don’t worry. I’ll trim those tomorrow.” And she just nods.

How does that happen? When you spend time with someone you get to know them...you get to know their mind.

This parable is really about how you use the gifts God has loaned you with his mind – thinking the way Jesus would think about how to use the resources you have been given — in the way that Jesus would do it.

The first two servants really knew the Master.

They knew who he was, and what he would want, how he would act with the riches they had been entrusted with. And they were faithful to that end.

The third servant – had no idea who his Master was. And this is the clincher...

Notice what the servant says, “I know you were a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and sowing where you did not reap. So I was afraid, and I hid the talent in the ground.”

Who is he talking about?

This description of the Master is in complete contrast to how Jesus has painted who this Master is!

This Master put a fortune into the hands of his servants trusting them completely to use these gifts faithfully.

And then liberally and graciously opened the gates of heaven to the first two servants.

Do you see how our wrong image of who God is, can stunt our effectiveness for him?

Do you see how if we are afraid of God, and what he will do if we make a mistake, how that can hinder the work of the kingdom?

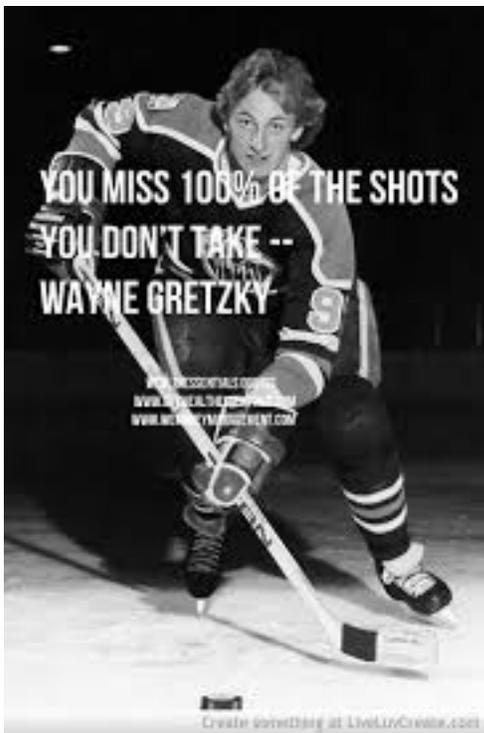
The phrase, “To him who has even more will be given and to him who has not, even what he has will be taken away,” is a hard one to palate unless you understand this

That when we live in fear of punishment

When we live in fear of God’s judgment and making mistakes

When we live in a way that makes our faith all about us, and clinging to what we have in order to preserve it...we will lose the very thing we are trying to save.

Wayne Gretzky put it this way...You miss 100 percent of the shots you dont take...



So have courage!

If we don’t risk and take a chance with God’s gifts, if we don’t give our lives away...we will never truly live – we will die...

We are called to live by investing in God's kingdom – a formula for joy and life...

We are called to take a chance for the gospel –

Martin Luther King said, **“We know what we are living for, after we figure out what we will die for.”**

The two servants took a risk, invested their gifts and they were rewarded with more.

That's the way it always is.

God is benevolent, and generous, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. You invest in his kingdom, you give what you have been given, he will *always* restore your fortunes a hundredfold.

That's the mind of God...”**Give and it shall be given unto you, pressed down, shaken together, and running over...**”

That's who God is. That's how he thinks.

Bigger, more generous, more abundant, more joy-filled than we humans can ever wrap our minds around.

Giving us a fortune - with our lives, our loved ones, our friends our time, our resources, to use to promote the gospel

So what are you afraid of church?

Have courage...

God is good and utterly reliable

Use what you have been given to invest in the kingdom

You will find joy

And you will LIVE...

