

The Stories Of Jesus Part 9

Spiritual Stewardship

Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 16:1-16

Memory Verses: Luke 16:10

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

We're in a series about the parables called The Stories of Jesus. A parable is normally thought of as a short story using an easily understood concept to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used parables in this way, but also for a more important reason; to reveal those who had open hearts to hear and those who had hardened hearts which would not hear. As we've said, the parables were really a spiritual barometer to determine believers from non-believers. Those who came back seeking for the explanation were granted the truth, while those who cared less for a greater explanation carried on in ignorance.

Today we are going to be looking at two more parables, each concerning the topic of stewardship. Stewardship is a just a fancy name for resource management. It's how we spend, invest, and strategically use our time, talents, and treasure.

I remember learning about stewardship as a child. When I was 6 my mom started giving me a small allowance for different things like cleaning my room and tying my shoes. I also got a star if my behavior was good. At the end of the month mom and dad would take me to the toy store where I could spend my small allowance. I almost always got my favorite childhood toy, Transformers. I learned about earning money, saving money, and spending my money on things that were important to me. When I became a teenager my mom set up a bank account for me and taught me about earning interest. I learned that if I allow the bank to use my money that over time I could earn extra money. She also taught me about tithing. She told me that according to the Bible the first 10 percent of everything I earn in life should be given back to God as an act of worship. She said, God takes care of those who are obedient to give in this way. Lastly, she taught me that all of these principles about money can be applied to the Christian life. As followers of Christ we must invest in the kingdom, we must multiply what we have for the sake of Christ, and we must always be willing to give to those in need and the ministries of the church, knowing that none of what we have is ours, it all belongs to God.

But even with all of these lessons I didn't really learn about Stewardship until I went to India my senior year of college. One of my responsibilities at the orphanage I was ministering at was to help the 3rd grade children learn English. One of the boys I was tutoring was named

Moses. Everyday after our lessons all the boys would go outside for recess and play a number of different games, that I didn't understand, using a cricket ball. Cricket is really big in India. I would try to play with the kids but to no avail, I was not very good. One day, dripping sweat, exhausted, and humiliated by being beat by third graders over and over again, I sat down to relax. At that moment Moses came over to me and gave me his **Cricket ball**. I looked at him perplexed. He said, "Shevi Anya, please take this, I want you to have it." I asked, "why, do you have another one?" He said, "no, it is the only thing I have, but I want you to have it." I argued, "Moses, I'm not taking the only thing you have, you keep it." He replied, "But I want to. I know God will give me another one someday." I went to my room that night humbled. One of the poorest children I knew had cared for me enough to give me his only possession. In the spiritual sense, he wasn't willing to play it safe and hold onto his. Rather he was willing to risk not having a Cricket ball at all, in order to share the love of Christ with a man he barely knew. I sat there praying that God would bless Moses and my Indian friends more than they had blessed me. A couple days went by and again I met Moses for tutoring and as soon as I saw him he said, "Shevi Anya, guess what?" I said "what?" He put his hands in his pockets and pulled out two Cricket balls. He said, "I told you God would give."

Those who use what they have to build the kingdom of God, they will not be forgotten. When we invest the kingdom in others we will see a return. We cannot escape the fact that we are all called to be Stewards of Christ's love and salvation. And, we most certainly cannot determine to merely exist as "Christians" and do nothing for the kingdom. The Bible tells us that those who take the salvation of Christ and all that that entails and refuse to reproduce it in the lives of those around them, that they are wicked and lazy.

I've observed religious looking, church going, mainstream Christians now for over 30 years and the one thing I can say is pretty obvious about most of them is the fact that they are good at the don'ts but not so much on the dos. They are pretty good at don't drink, don't cuss, don't watch R rated movies, don't listen to secular music, and don't play the lottery. But they aren't so good at do give to the poor and needy, do love the hard to love and marginalized, do share the Gospel with the lost, do disciple each other in the word, and do go build the kingdom of God.

The two parables that we are going to look at today deal with those type of people. Some play it safe and choose not to risk their lives for the sake of building the kingdom of God, while others risk it all to please their God and multiply themselves in the lives of others. Some have no thought of how to strategize and plan to see Christ glorified through the transformation of a dark world into light, while others methodically, and tactically plot ways to grow the kingdom of God in their community. This morning the question to us is simple: **"When It Comes To Being A Steward Of The Kingdom Of Jesus Christ, Are You Going To Play It**

Safe, Or Risk It All?"

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to see this morning about being a steward is that... **Jesus Expects His Stewards To Risk His Resources For The Sake of Building The Kingdom.** We see this principle when we look at a very popular parable; the Parable of The Talents. Look with me in **Matthew 25:14-30**. In this parable Jesus describes a man who goes on a journey, entrusting his stewards with his wealth and possessions in his absence. To one steward, the master gives five talents, to a second he gives two talents, and to the third he gives one.

Talents were units of measurement often used for silver or gold. If it were gold in this instance the money would have been in the millions of dollars in today's value. He gives his stewards a measure of his wealth according to their abilities. Two of the stewards invested the master's money in such a way that when he returned they had doubled the original amount. The third servant however was not prudent. He dug a hole in the ground and hid it so that he would not lose any of what his master had given him. When the master eventually returned the stewards who were faithful were praised and entrusted with more of the master's wealth. The servant who was fearful, however, was reprimanded, called wicked, lazy, and worthless, and his talent was taken from him and given to one of the other stewards. Lastly, he was thrown out of his master's presence.

The master in this parable is meant to represent Jesus. The stewards represent those who have said that they desire to follow Jesus. Jesus has made it clear to his followers that they are to take the resources that he has given them and multiply them in the lives of others. One day he will return and faithful followers will be proven as true and pretend followers will be proven false. **Just because Jesus is physically absent from the earth, doesn't mean his followers are given the freedom to sit back and do nothing.**

What has Jesus entrusted us with as his stewards? We are entrusted with spreading the Gospel in **Matthew 28:16-20**. We are entrusted with discipling and caring for the church in **John 21:17**. We are entrusted with taking care of the needy in **Matthew 25:25**. And we are entrusted with loving outsiders in **Matthew 25:35**. Of course there is much more but these are some of the big ones. The point is that as Stewards Jesus has made us co-laborers with him in his ministry. We are in essence, in charge of the things that Christ values most. It's like a parent handing his kid the keys to the car or a boss entrusting the management of his company to his valued employee. This is an incredible responsibility; one Christ-followers should take seriously. They know that they are only borrowing the car or temporarily managing their

master's business. But more than just protecting their master's wealth or possessions, a good steward will also find ways to grow and improve it. Personally, for us as Christians, this also applies to our time, money, body, and abilities. All of these are on loan from God and should be used to multiply his kingdom.

Determining which kind of steward you are is based upon your motivations; faith or fear. The first two stewards were motivated by faith. They knew that their master was one worthy of their time, and dedication. They had faith that if they risked their time, talents, and treasures for the sake of their master's kingdom that they would see an increase and be rewarded. The last steward was motivated by fear. He knew that his master was powerful and could punish him if he lost what had been entrusted to him, so he buried it to keep it safe. The possibility of failure was not worth the risk.

Many of us have been given wealth, physical abilities, and available time. All of us have at least been given salvation, the Holy Spirit living within us, and the Word of God. And yet many of us still refuse to risk it for the sake of the lost and the needy. Is giving your money to the poor a risk? Of course it is, you don't know if they will use it wisely and in the end be better off because of it. Is giving your time a risk? Of course, you don't know who will appreciate it or abuse it. Is giving the Gospel a risk? Of course, you may be ostracized, criticized, and persecuted, and those you are trying to reach may reject the message anyway. So maybe we should just take what we've been given and keep it to ourselves. Maybe we should take our little light and hide it under a bushel, right? Of course not. The Bible tells us that the Gospel message always finds a home. That our love and care for the needy is always seen by our Father in Heaven. That if we risk our very lives for the sake of the Kingdom of God in the end it is no risk at all because we will have everlasting life with our savior in paradise! What good is it for someone to gain the world and yet lose their soul? Or, even more relevant for this group this morning; what good is it for someone to be **given the Kingdom of God and yet forfeit his soul because he refused to risk it for the sake of Jesus Christ.**

When Jesus returns or you go to be with him what account will you give him. Those who are faithful with what they're entrusted with, big and small, will be trusted with more, and Jesus said that they are the ones who will "enter into their master's joy" and share in the glory of his presence. Those who are not may face the harsh reality of being called a wicked and lazy servant. Worst of all, they may not share in the joy of their master's presence when he returns. Both outcomes should motivate Christ-followers to become more intentional with their time and master's "talents." One day the master will return, and when he does, he'll want to know what we've done with this precious life we've been given. Were we good stewards of what belongs to him? Did we grow his investment? Or did we bury our time,

talent, and opportunities? It's up to us to decide, but we better decide quickly. The master is planning his return and will be back at any moment. **"When It Comes To Being A Steward Of The Kingdom Of Jesus Christ, Are You Going To Play It Safe, Or Risk It All?"**

Secondly, we need to see that as stewards **Jesus Expects His Stewards To Strategically Use Worldly Resources For Heavenly Gain**. We see this principle in a lesser known parable; The Parable of Dishonest Manager in **Luke 16:1-13**. This is somewhat of unorthodox parable from Jesus. The story is simple, but the setting is unusual. In most of Jesus' parables, the protagonist is either representative of God, Christ, or some other positive character. In this parable the characters are all wicked. The steward and the man whose possessions he manages are both unsavory characters. This should alert us to the fact that Jesus is not exhorting us to emulate the behavior of the characters but is trying to expound on a larger principle.

The parable begins with a rich man calling his steward before him to inform him that he will be relieving him of his duties for mismanaging his master's resources. The steward had authority over all of the master's resources and could transact business in his name. The steward is being fired for mismanaging the rich man's funds. The steward, realizing that he will soon be without a job, makes some shrewd deals behind his master's back by reducing the debt owed by several of the master's debtors in exchange for money and shelter when he is eventually put out. When the master becomes aware of what the wicked servant had done, he commends him for his "shrewdness."

In His application of the story in the remaining verses, Jesus begins by saying, "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." Jesus is drawing a contrast between the "sons of the world" (i.e., unbelievers) and the "sons of light" (believers). He's saying that in many cases unbelievers are wiser in the things of this world than believers are. The unjust steward, once he knew he was about to be put out, maneuvered to collect some quick cash, cheat his master, and make friends of his master's debtors—who would then be obligated to care for him once he lost his job.

So the big question is, "what does this have to do with believers being wise with the kingdom of God? Let's look at **verse 9**: "And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." Jesus is encouraging His followers to be strategic with their wealth in this life so that in the life to come they will receive "eternal dwellings." This is similar to Jesus' teaching on wealth in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus exhorts His followers to lay up treasures in heaven.

Try not to get hung up on the term *unrighteous wealth*. Jesus is

not saying that believers should gain wealth unrighteously and then be generous with it. More than likely Jesus is using this term to mean secular wealth, or wealth that is not true wealth like salvation. So, the principle that Jesus is trying to convey is one of a just steward rather than an unjust one. The unjust steward saw his master's resources as a means for his own personal enjoyment and advancement. Conversely, **Jesus wants His followers to be just, righteous stewards. If we understand the principle that everything we own is a gift from God, then we realize that God is the owner of everything and that we are His stewards. As such, we are to use the Master's resources to further the Master's goals. In this specific case, we are to be generous with our wealth and use it for the benefit of others.**

And when we do so, we are to be shrewd, or tactical; strategic. **We don't simply and casually throw the kingdom's resources at the wall and see what sticks. We do the best we can with what we have. This takes careful planning, and intentional procedure. This is why at Stone Creek, we don't just send our people and our money just anywhere at anytime. We have a specific method which includes three boards of elected members; Deacons, Trustees, and Finance. Each board carefully examines our resources and how best to use them for the kingdom of God. We find out where God is working, plan out a vision and strategy to accomplish what God is calling us to, accept the plan through a unified vote, and then we work with each covenant partner to implement the plan. We also have teams to help these boards find vision, strategy, and means of implementation. These include the missions team which is our first means of developing local and foreign missions plans, along with most outreach events. It also includes the benevolence team which determines which impromptu local needs we meet, and of course it includes the Kids, Students, and Worship teams. And none of the plans, strategies, and implementations of these plans go forward without the approval of our covenant partners. This is how we strategically use our resources for the kingdom of God. **We strategically use worldly wealth for the kingdom through the ministry of the local church.****

Jesus then goes on to expand in **verse 10** the principle that if one is faithful in "little" (i.e., "unrighteous" wealth), then one will be faithful in much. This is now the second time we've heard that those who are faithful with little will be faithful with much. Our prayer is that we are being faithful as individual believers and as a church with the little that God has entrusted to us so that he will entrust to us even more.

Verses 13-16 puts a fine point on Jesus' parable. There are those, like the pharisees, who love money and exalt it above God. You can't force your way into the kingdom of God with your wealth. In other words, **are you willing to risk the worldly wealth that you have for the sake of God's kingdom or are you going to try to do it your own way? **"When It Comes To Being A Steward Of The Kingdom Of Jesus Christ, Are You Going To Play It Safe, Or Risk It All?"****

Application

We have been called as believers to use the resources that God has entrusted to us to multiply his kingdom. We must not bury our time, talents, and treasure in the sand. Rather we must risk all that we have in a strategic manner knowing that God will bless our efforts and reward us in eternity. So what exactly are you personally risking? How many of you would characterize your “christian life” as multiplying kingdom resources and how many of you if you were honest would say you've basically done nothing?

How have you risked your abilities? How have you risked your wealth? How have you risked your time? How have you risked your life? When is the last time you strategically planned out how to use your resources for the kingdom? Don't you believe that it is worth your time to think about how best to spend kingdom resources? Have you been a good spiritual steward with the kingdom of God? **“When It Comes To Being A Steward Of The Kingdom Of Jesus Christ, Are You Going To Play It Safe, Or Risk It All?”** Remember, the consequences of playing it safe are not good. It could mean you are not as Christian as you think.

Conclusion

I think about Moses often. He would be around 28 years old today. I don't know if he's alive, if he's married, if he has kids, or if he is even still with the same ministry. But I do know this, 20 years ago he showed me what it meant to give all one has to bless someone in the name of Jesus Christ, and I know that if he is still alive somewhere out there in Andhra Pradesh, India he is risking it all for the kingdom. This Cricket ball reminds me that I have no right to do any less.