**Title:** Playing it safe (Matt. 25:14-30) – The Parable of the Talents

**Introduction:** Stories can teach, and they can create teachable moments. In recent years, producers have rewritten many familiar childhood stories. They have been amended in such a way that the child hears a message intended for innocent ears, while the adult with her hears a message that is not quite so innocent.

Consider the story of Snow White. A young girl sees this story and reacts by dreaming about true love’s kiss. The mother, who happens to be having a bad day based on some poor financial decisions, sees Snow White take a bite of that apple. Knowing the story, she realizes that Snow was stupid for biting into the apple. She should have known better. So mom says to herself, “People do things even when they know it might be a bad idea. But if we're lucky, kind, or beautiful enough, someone will come along and save the day!” The result is she doesn’t take personal responsibility for her bad decisions but waits for someone to rescue her from her stupidity.

Then there’s the story of Aladdin. A young man sees the story and comes away believing he can rise above any limitation, even gravity. All he needs is a magic lamp and a genie. The dad who is struggling with some identity issues hears this message: “If you want to be accepted by the people who are important to you, you have to dress like them, use their mode of transportation, and be able to sing. I’m not like them, but I can be. Who needs a genie when you can buy your status symbols with a credit card?”[[1]](#endnote-1)

Does that sound cynical? If you mismanage your resources enough times, cynicism will be the natural result. Jesus was no cynic. He was a realist. He knew what was coming, and He wanted to prepare His disciples for it.

We come today to the second of three stories Jesus told in Matthew 25. It only takes a casual reading of this story to conclude that Jesus is concerned about how we invest the resources God has given us. These resources include money and material possessions, but they also include time, energy, intelligence, and relationships.

When you are interpreting and applying the truths of these stories, you must keep in mind their original context. Jesus told the stories to motivate His disciples to prepare for *the End Times*. Jesus does not use stock end times terminology in these parables – “wars and rumors of wars,” “false Messiahs and false prophets,” “signs in the heavens.” But he does compare the kingdom of God to the events of the first two parables (Matt. 25:1, 14), and He speaks of the coming of the Son of Man “in his glory” in the final one (Matt. 25:31). *All* of what Jesus had to say in Matthew 24 and 25 had to do with either the near or distant future. Depending on your perspective, the future wasn’t looking so good.

Think about it. The disciples had just found out the Temple was going to be destroyed, Jerusalem was going to be sacked, and the earth itself would be destroyed (Matt. 24:35). How would you react to the news? Would you run and hide? Would you pull out your bucket list and do all those death-defying acts you would have never before risked? Parachuting out of an airplane. Check. Freestyle rock climbing, skiing down the double black diamond slope. Check and check. If you die, you’ll only beat the rest of the world by a few seconds. Would you go party and get drunk? You know; “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow, we die!” It’s easy to become a cynic when you believe that everything important to you is about to disappear.

Jesus told His disciples something shocking. He told them with the end of the world quickly approaching, now is the time to invest, to get busy, to pour every ounce of energy that they had into growing the Kingdom. It’s not the time to retreat; it’s time to advance! No, you can’t change the future. You can’t save the world, but you can rescue some of the world’s people. It’s risky. It’s also worth the risk. It would be a hard message for them to accept.

It goes against human nature to invest in a bear market (when stock values/prices are falling). But doing so can reap huge dividends. Take Noah for example. I don’t think he was surprised when God came to him with His plans for the destruction of the human race. Moses had to wonder about the logic of bringing children into a world like that. It took him 500 years to decide it was worth the risk (Gen. 5:32). He knew his world was going to be destroyed, yet at God’s command to fill the earth and build a boat, he got to work on both. We’re here today because Noah put aside his logic and his fears and invested in the future.

Jeremiah is another example of someone who invested during difficult times. Just before Judah went into captivity to Babylon, God told Jeremiah to purchase a piece of land from his cousin, Hanamel. “Really God? Jerusalem is under siege. I’m under house arrest. And the Babylonians are about to break through the wall!” It was a bad time to invest in property, but it was a good time to obey God. The purchase was a sign from God that bad times weren’t going to last forever. Judah would be coming back to the land (Jer. 32). So, he invested.

Jesus’ message to His original disciples is the same message to His current ones. Invest. While you’re waiting for my return, take my resources and invest them. Let’s take a look at the story to understand and apply its truth.

1. **All the resources belong to the Master.** (Matt. 25:14-15)

If we accept that the Master in this story is Jesus, then we must accept the story teaches Jesus is the owner of everything – people, stuff – everything. Jesus’ ultimate ownership is the most important truth in the story. Recognizing that Jesus owns me (“His own servants”) and everything in my hands (“His possessions”) motivates me to do what He wants with His resources. Doing so builds His trust in me.

1. The Master trusts His servants with His resources. *“entrusted his possessions to them”*

Let’s say you were getting ready to go on a long trip – weeks, months, maybe even years. You can’t leave your stuff unattended. You might find a squatter living in your house when you returned. So how would you choose someone to watch your stuff? What kind of traits would they need? Honest, clean, organized, not forgetful, someone you can trust. Would you pick you to take care of someone else’s stuff? God did. Paul said that he, and by implication, we have been entrusted with the Gospel and its proclamation (Acts 20:24; Gal. 2:7). He said the Jews were entrusted with the recording and transmission of God’s Word (Rom. 3:2). I as your pastor have been entrusted with you, the people of this church, and I am responsible to God to protect you (1 Peter 5:2) God trusts me! Do you understand what an honor it is to be trusted by God?

I could betray that trust. I do so by treating God’s possessions as if they were my own. If I own something, and I don’t have any use for it anymore, I am less likely to treat it with proper care. That’s why pastors who forget that the congregation does not belong to them can become authoritarian and abusive (1 Pet. 5:3-4). I am not the owner. I am a steward. A steward is someone who uses God-given resources for the accomplishment of God-given goals. An owner has rights. A steward only has responsibilities.

For example, when your son gets old enough to borrow the car, he does not have the right to sell the car, paint the car or race the car. He only has responsibilities – fill it with gas, wash it, and get it home on time without a scratch on it. If he does not fulfill those responsibilities, then he loses access to the car, and the trust level goes down. The same applies to me if I fail to treat what is under my care as if it belonged to God alone. Since the resources are God’s, I also don’t have the right to tell God what He should have placed in my care.

1. The Master distributes His resources as He desires. *“five,” “two,” “one”*

A little while ago, we mentioned some famous fairy tales and the lessons they teach. What does the story of Robin Hood teach? The intended message is people should not be taken advantage of and abused for the privilege of others. But someone could also come away from that story believing all of us deserve the same resources. If I don’t have what you have, there’s something wrong with that. I might even be applauded for working to bring equity regardless of the means I have to use to get there.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Jesus’ story does not teach equity; it teaches responsibility. Because the resources belonged to the Master, he could do with them whatever He wanted (Matt. 20:1-16). Now there’s a reason *why* He gave different amounts to each one, and we’ll get to that in a moment, but there’s no indication in the parable that He explained His reasoning to the servants. There is also no record of any of the servants getting mad at their master or jealous of one another. But there is a record of how well they used what their master had entrusted to their care.

Let’s stop here a minute for a point of application. What is your reaction when you see that your neighbor or sister or fellow church member has more than you? More grandkids and more time with them, more prestige, more vacation time, more money, more looks, more skills…and the list could go on. It’s so easy to compare ourselves with one another and think because they have more and I have less, they must be doing something wrong, or I must be. Worse yet, I can charge God with doing something wrong. God is not generous with them and stingy with you. Don’t get angry or worrisome when you only get one. Be thankful that you got any at all!

The amount of money the master in Jesus’ story possessed would suggest that he could have had much more than just three servants. The rest of them got nothing. Understand this too. It’s not always a bad thing to be given fewer resources to work with. Luke 12:48 says, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required.” Use well what God has given *you*. You won’t be held responsible for what He has given someone else, but you will be held responsible for what He has given you.

1. The Master knows how much of His resources each can handle. *“according to his own ability”*

The Master had a good reason for distributing His resources to His servants the way He did – He knew them. He knew their capabilities and their limitations. How did He know? Through past or current performance. God knows you too. He knows your gifts. He gave them to you. He knows your dreams and your fears and your limitations. He knows that giving you more responsibility than you can handle would be harmful to you and to others.

Imagine giving your car keys to your 6-year old child. Most children at that age don’t even *want* the car keys. They’re not interested. The older they get though, the more desirous and insistent they become. Legally, they’re ready at a set age, but as a parent, you must decide when *your* child is ready. Every child is different. There is no cookie-cutter method of raising children – no magic age when they are ready to drive or date or be employed. How do you know when they’re ready? You watch their past performance.

Did they need constant reminders to do their homework, or were they faithful to do it without supervision? What is their level of self-control? Do they keep their promises? It’s not a fun job to limit your children’s access to what they believe will enhance their lives. But doing so keeps them and those around them safe.

Do you think God, your loving Father, enjoys limiting your access to good things? What kind of love would it be for God to pour blessings into our lives indiscriminately? Those blessings would quickly become curses if we weren’t ready to handle them. They would become a temptation we were never equipped to handle. God has promised He won’t do that (1 Cor. 10:13).

Maybe you think you can handle more. Examine what you already have – all of it – and evaluate what kind of a job you’re doing with what you have right now. Why would God trust you with more if you don’t value what you currently possess enough to invest it well (Luke 16:10-12)? Here’s a test: if you want the Master’s resources more than you want the Master, you’re not ready.

You’re not the Master. He has entrusted to you some of what belongs to Him. Do you trust Him to allocate those resources well? We may not know the reason why God limits the resources *or* why He pours out the blessings into our lives. We just have to trust that He has a reason.

1. **We get to decide how we will use His resources.** (Matt. 25:16-18)

The Master in Jesus’ story put His resources in the hands of His servants, and then He left on His trip. What did He want them to *do* with the resources? He doesn’t make that clear, at least not here. In Luke 19:11-26, Jesus tells a story similar to this one. The Master in that story tells the servants what they were to do with His resources: “Do business with this until I come back” (vs. 13). The servants here have no instructions. “What am I supposed to do with this?” Have you ever asked that question?

It may be Jesus left the servants’ instructions out of this version of the story on purpose. It was a test. It wasn’t about direct disobedience. It was about evaluating how well the servants really knew their Master and what it was He would want them to do. Two knew their Master and their task. They did well. One claimed to know his Master, but his actions proved he did not.

1. The Master’s servants can invest His resources. *“traded with them” (v. 16)*

The best way we can deal with the Master’s resources is to invest them. That is not something that you do haphazardly or accidentally. If you expect to reap a good return, there is work involved. You research. You pay the costs – the transaction fee. You diversify, spreading your opportunity for growth and minimizing your risk. Over time, you develop the skills to succeed. You grow. As you do, something changes inside of you emotionally.

When you invest, you become invested. It becomes your passion (Matt. 6:21). You talk about it all the time. You check the markets on a daily, hourly or even moment by moment basis. It becomes annoying to the people around you, but you don’t care. Your investments are important to you. [at that moment, show a picture of your family or call your children up to the front of the church] These are my investments. You thought I was talking about money with all that investment talk. It is true that we must be careful about where we invest God’s money. But my greatest investment is my children. My children will outlive whatever retirement income I have accumulated, and they may be the source of my retirement income if I have not accumulated enough! My children are eternal. I’m investing in something that will outlive me.

Thank you to some of you who, though your children are grown, you took time to invest in mine! And for those of you who don’t have children, you can invest in the future of this church and God’s Kingdom by investing in the nursery babies and the middle school boys. Make sure you're investing in the right commodities. And make sure you don’t wait too long to start investing.

There is no larger issue than timing when it comes to investing. How many of you wish you had invested in Apple or Amazon when they first went public? These servants got started “immediately” in their investing (Matthew 25:16). Most 25-year-olds aren’t thinking about retirement. They need to be. The earlier you invest, the greater the chance that you will have enough money to last you through retirement.

The ironic reality is that of those Christians who are investing, most of them are investing for retirement instead of investing for the return of Jesus. Giving to missions, teaching a Sunday school class, serving your wife in Jesus’ name, being a godly witness at your workplace – these are all ways you can invest in the Kingdom. It’s so easy to have faulty priorities and to excuse procrastination. But all procrastination gets you regret. It doesn’t do any good to bemoan missed opportunities. Learn from them. Move forward. “Fortune favors the bold.” There probably are good and bad times to invest financially, but the time for spiritual investment is now!

1. The Master’s servants can protect His resources. *“hid his master’s money” (v. 18)*

For most of us, we do exactly what the third servant did. We hide the Master’s resources. It wouldn’t be difficult to excuse his actions. The Master put them into the servant’s hands and left it to the servant to decide how to use those resources. If someone goes away on a long trip and puts the keys to their house in your hand, do you presume they want you to list it on Airbnb and rent it out for them while they’re gone? Maybe the reason he hid it was, he knew if it was in plain sight, he might be tempted to spend it on himself. “Out of sight, out of mind.” He was avoiding temptation. It was just easier to play it safe.

We could assume many reasons for his actions, but we don’t need to; he tells the Master why he did it. He was afraid (Matt. 25:25). I get it. Investing is scary especially when you’re investing someone else’s money. They have expectations. What if you make a mistake? What if you fail? How are you going to provide for your family if you lose your job? You can live in fear or you can live by faith.

Faith does not guarantee you will succeed, but it does guarantee you will try. Don’t get me wrong. Faith is still scary. It’s just that faith prevents your fear from controlling you. Faith says, “It all belongs to God, so I’m going to do with it what He says and leave the results up to Him.” Be obedient, and you will never be a failure.

It’s easy to excuse our failure to invest when we think that we have nothing to invest. If you’re a Christian, you have much to invest that can reap eternal dividends. You have the Gospel. Paul was awed that God had entrusted the proclamation of the Gospel into his hands. He said it repeatedly (Acts 20:24; 1 Cor. 9:17; Gal. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; Tit. 1:3). Paul said that he *refused* to hide this Gospel.

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* (Rom. 1:16)

Why wasn’t he ashamed? The Gospel was constantly getting him into trouble. But he knew the Gospel has the power to positively and permanently change the life of anyone who believes, regardless of their culture or their past. It rescues them from all the terrible consequences of the bad life investments from their past.

Investing always involves risk. There is no return without risk. Giving people the Gospel will help them, but it will cost you. You think it’s risky now to tell people the Good News of Jesus Christ? Just wait until the Tribulation! People will get their heads cut off for doing that. There is one group that has the risk associated with evangelism mitigated (lessened) during the Tribulation. There will be 144,000 Jews, 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes that get saved during the Tribulation and are then sent out as the largest missionary force in history. God seals them. They can’t get sick, can’t be killed and are unaffected by all the calamities occurring in the Tribulation (Rev. 7:3-4).

For the 144,000, there is no physical risk, but there is still emotional risk. For most of us, we don’t fail to share our faith because we fear some physical harm. We don’t tell because we fear failure or rejection. So we hide the Gospel in the soil of our hearts. We keep it safe and unproductive. Payday is coming. The Master will require an accounting.

1. **We will have to answer to the Master for how we used His resources.** (Matt. 25:19-20, 22, 24)
2. This accounting will happen in the future. *“after a long time” (v. 19)*

Investing is a long-term enterprise. It doesn’t matter if you are a businessman starting a restaurant, a parent or teacher working with children, or a pastor growing disciples, it requires patience. There are moments when you get to see an immediate return on your investment, but they are rare. “Buy and hold.” That’s the investment mantra. You’ve always got one eye on the present and one on the future.

Jesus probably had His eye on the future as He communicated this part of the story. Jesus said the reason He was telling the story was to let His disciples know that the Kingdom of God was still in the distant future (Luke 19:11). The accounting that Jesus speaks of will happen in the future at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We’ll save a full explanation for another day, but this is the event in which our service and the motivation for that service will be evaluated. On that future date, we will receive the just consequences for the life we lived.

The danger of communicating the futureness (my made up word) of the evaluation is we might not take it seriously. When Hezekiah, one of the good kings of Judah, found out the Babylonians would take his descendants into captivity, he reacted with nonchalance (Is. 39:5-8). “Why do I care; it’s in the future.” Be careful. For the disciples, the Kingdom of God was in the distant future. For you, it might be tomorrow that you stand before Jesus.

1. This accounting will happen in front of the Master. *“the master…settled accounts” (v. 19)*

The gladdest or saddest day for any broker is the day they give a report to their clients on the performance of their investment. The success or failure of the broker determines the setting for the report. If the investment has done well, he makes the report in person, and everybody smiles. If not, a letter or an email goes out. Who wants to face clients when you only have bad news?

With Jesus, we don’t get to choose the circumstances of our accounting. Jesus said the Father has committed all judgment into His hands (John 5:22). We will not stand in front of a jury composed of our peers. We will not be judged by the angels. We will judge them (1 Cor. 6:3). Though Satan is our accuser (Rev. 12:10), thankfully he is not our judge. We will stand in front of Jesus (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). All-seeing, All-knowing, All-powerful Jesus. The One who took up His cross for us and requires that we take up our cross for Him (Rom. 12:1).

How do you react to the fact that Jesus is your Judge? Your reaction depends on two things: how well you’ve done and how well you know the Master.

1. **The Master will reward us in proportion to how we used His resources.** (Matt. 25:21, 23, 26-30)
2. Positive consequence (vvs. 21, 23)
3. Assessment of servant’s person (nature and actions) *“Well done, good and faithful slave”*

I would imagine that when the first two servants heard their Master had returned, they were excited. They had a 100% return on their investment. Their Master would be pleased. They had no idea! The Master didn’t just praise their efforts or their results. The Master praised *them*! He called them “good” and “faithful.” He was more concerned with what was going on inside of them – the evidence of their character – than what was going on in his assets. The same is true of Jesus. He is far more concerned with who you are than He is with what you do. People who have bad character can produce outstanding things if there is enough motivation. But they will never be outstanding people. Jesus wants outstanding people, not outstanding producers.

Which do you think your children would rather have: the toy they want for Christmas or to hear their dad say, “I’m proud of you?” I guess it depends on their value system. To the church of Smyrna, Jesus said, “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) … Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:9-10). Jesus commended other churches for their works, but He does not mention works in His letter to them. They hadn’t accomplished much, but they were solid. He commended them for who they were not for what they’d done. It was enough. No, *they* were enough.

What about you? Would you rather have affirmation from the significant people in your life – your kids, your wife, your parents, your Lord, or would you rather have a promotion? Affirmation or promotion? Tough choice. What if you could have both?

1. Advancement of servant’s position *“put you in charge of many things”*

The first two servants got both the affirmation and the promotion. They had proved themselves trustworthy in very small details which got them this opportunity for advancement (1 Cor. 4:2). Those who were not looking for a promotion proved themselves worthy of it. They were faithful, trustworthy – the very characteristic for which their Master had been searching. They remembered that the resources were not theirs to use for their own personal comfort. So comfort became a part of their reward.

1. Addition of servant’s perks *“enter into the joy of your master”*

What kind of perks go along with the position you long for? A reserved parking space, a country club membership, the corner office? I don’t know what kind of perks these servants received. Jesus is not specific. Their exact nature is not what’s important. What is important is the emotional response those perks created – “joy,” and whose company they enjoyed as they participated in the perks – “your master.”

How many “successful” people have all the pleasures but don’t enjoy them because they have no one significant with whom to share them? One day, Jesus will call us into His presence where we will be forever. I’ve often been asked what we will be doing in Heaven. I don’t have all the answers to that question. But I know we will be doing it with Jesus, and His presence will be enough.

For those who still think of the reward as the important part of what’s coming, learn this from the parable. Though each of these servants gained different amounts for their Master through their efforts, there was *no difference* in the reward they received from their Master! They were rewarded based not on how much they gained but based on what they did with what they were given.

It’s easy to think, “I could do more for God if I could…” You fill in the blank. Don’t wish for what someone else has (1 Cor. 12:14-17). Take stock of what you have, be thankful for it, and find a way to invest it for the Kingdom of God! Be obedient to God to do what He wants with His resources. You’ve got something of His in your hands. Identify it. Use it, and you can have just as much reward as the person who has been blessed with far more resources.

I wish we could stop with the assessment of the good and faithful. We cannot because Jesus did not. We still have one more servant to deal with.

1. Negative consequence (vvs. 26-30)
2. Assessment of servant’s person (nature and actions) *“wicked, lazy slave,” “worthless”*

The servants had mixed emotions about their Master’s return. The first two servants were excited, especially now that they heard the Master’s response and discovered their reward. The third servant was probably relieved at first when he heard the news of his Master’s return. The heavy burden of responsibility was about to be lifted from his shoulders. He hadn’t wanted it anyway. He had successfully kept the Master’s money safe.

The whole time the Master was gone, the servant had been on edge. Every night, he would go out to check the spot where he had hidden the money to make sure some thief hadn’t come along and stolen it. He watched the other two servants, fearing for them as they dangerously risked the Master’s resources. “You guys better be careful. Master is going to be angry if you lose His money.” I don’t know what he was expecting when he handed the money back to the Master, but I don’t think he got the reaction he was anticipating.

“Wicked.” “Lazy.” “Worthless.” As encouraging as it was for the first two servants to hear the words “good” and “faithful,” imagine how hurtful and demeaning it was for the third servant to hear these words especially since this assessment was done in front of the household! Can you see the look of shock and shame on the servant’s face? He thought He was doing a good thing by keeping His Master’s resources safe.

The wicked servant wasn’t wicked because he had wasted the Master’s resources. He was wicked because he had wasted an opportunity to grow the Master’s resources.

He didn’t get it. “The issue is, did you do what I wanted, not what *you thought* I wanted.” He didn’t understand the Master. He was not the only one. Jesus said there will be “many” who come to Him on the day of judgment and show off all the good works they have done as evidence of their worthiness. Jesus will do the same thing to them He did to this guy. He will throw them out (Matt. 7:21-23).

1. Abandonment of servant’s position *“take away…throw out”*

You’ve heard it before. “Use it or lose it.” Since the third servant was not willing to use what he had been given, several things happened. First, the Master gave him a suggestion of what he could have done that was at least marginally better than hiding it in the ground. He hadn’t even done that. The second thing that happened was the Master took his talent and gave it to the guy who now had ten talents. In the other telling of this story (Luke 19), the servants complain that the Master’s actions are not fair.

Their concern doesn’t seem to be so much for the third servant. They understand why the one talent is being taken away from him. It’s the same reason an investment broker loses an account. He hasn’t done anything with it. They just don’t think it’s fair that the guy who already has so much should be given more. “Give it to someone else” is their suggestion. They forget two things. It is the Master’s money. He can do with it whatever He wants. The first servant proved he could handle the heaviest responsibilities, so the Master was just doing what He had already promised – promoting him.

The third thing the Master did was the hardest so far. He fired him. If the story ended here, it would all make sense. But the Master took the punishment one step further.

1. Abdication of servant’s plans *“outer darkness…weeping and gnashing of teeth”*

The terms Jesus uses to describe the new condition of the third servant are harsh. They’re the same terms used to describe the existence people in Hell experience (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51). That seems a severe penalty for a failure to invest the Master’s resources. Give him a good tongue lashing. Makes sense. Take away his accounts, yes. Fire him, probably. Blackball him if you were feeling vengeful. Send him to Hell? It just doesn’t feel right.

What punishment would the victims of Enron or Bernie Madoff say was severe enough? The officials of Enron constructed their books in such a way that it looked like they were making huge profits. The stock soared in price. People invested their life savings. Just before the company went bankrupt, the top leaders sold their shares and left the investors with nothing. Madoff conducted the largest Ponzi scheme in history, embezzling billions of investors’ dollars.

What kind of punishment do a group of 14-16-year-olds deserve who watched and filmed as Jamel Dunn, aged 32, drowned right in front of them? They laughed and mocked him, but they didn’t call 911 or offer any help. What kind of punishment do they deserve?

Then there’s Robert Courtney. You probably don’t recognize the name, but his crime will shock you. Over a period of approximately ten years, he diluted or reduced the volume of 72 different medications, mostly chemotherapy drugs his clients received at his pharmacy. How many died because of his quest for greater profits? The judge gave him a 30-year sentence. Is that enough? Would it be enough if it was your child who died because of his crime?

Many would agree that horrendous crimes deserve a horrendous penalty. But is a failure to invest the Master’s resources a horrendous crime? It is if the resource you’re not investing affects the growth or lack thereof in God’s Kingdom. That’s what Jesus said was the subject of this whole parable. Paul said that the greatest resource he had was the Gospel. If I keep it hidden or dilute it, how many lives will potentially be destroyed? If I laugh and mock and spew hatred as they are drowning, what does that say about who I am as a person? If I sit back in comfort using the resources God intended to be invested in the lives of others, then I deserve to suffer torment for the rest of eternity.

1. **How we view the Master will determine what we do with His resources.** (Matt. 25:24-25)

In Robert Courtney’s trial, he was forced to sit and listen to the stories of all the people that he had maimed. In his defense, he said, “I don’t know why I did this.” I know why he did it. He saw his customers as a source of money rather than as an opportunity to serve. Your perspective of people will always play a role in how you relate to them. The same was true for these servants. For them, their actions were determined by how they saw their Master.

1. Do you see Him as harsh? *“reaping where you did not sow” (v. 24)*

Servant number three considered his Master to be a difficult client. The Master was assessing him; he chose to assess the Master. What’s interesting is the Master did not differ with the servant on the servant’s assessment. Jesus *is* tough. His expectations *are* high. There’s a difference though between being tough and being mean. Many people confuse the two. He expects us to be faithful even in the midst of persecution and trials and hardship. That’s what He did for us. You don’t get to choose what resources He places in your hand or what mission He gives you. You get to choose what you focus on. Do you focus on the hard thing He asks you to do, or do you focus on the rewards you will receive afterward (2 Cor. 4:18)? If you ask Him, He will give you all the resources you need to bear up under the hard things He requires of you.

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."* (2 Cor. 12:9)

*“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* (Matt. 11:28-30)

1. Do you see Him as good? *“give it to the one who has the ten talents” (v. 28)*

The other two servants saw their Master as good. A person can be tough and good at the same time. One of the early scenes in C. S. Lewis’ book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* describes an encounter between Lucy and Mr. Beaver. In it, he tells her about Aslan.

“Aslan is a lion- the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh," said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"..."Safe?" said Mr. Beaver ..."Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.”

His requirements are high, but His reward is higher (2 Cor. 4:17). Even in the punishment that the Master bestowed on the third servant, there is a hint of His goodness. He had to tell the other servants to take away the one talent the third servant had hidden in the ground. The implication is had the servant done the hard thing his master required, he would have gotten to keep both the original talent and whatever he gained through his work. The other servants got to. Doesn’t that point to the goodness of the Master? Imagine how motivated these servants would have been had they known that whatever they earned through their investments, they got to keep (Rev. 19:8)! The Master was good, and the good servants got to experience that goodness for the rest of their lives.

**Conclusion:** According to the Bible, we are living in the “last days,” but we’re not living in the Tribulation yet. The opportunities and struggles the people living at that time will face are the same opportunities and struggles we face today. It’s just the intensity level they will face is much higher. The risks will be greater. With greater risk comes greater potential for reward.

Though this parable is particularly focused on the future, it can have an impact on where we are today. Everything Jesus said about them is true for us. Hiding what God has given us will not please Him. But with the courage that comes from faith, we can invest whatever resources He has given us – our money, our time, our children, the Gospel – in whatever measure they have been given and grow His kingdom. It’s not the time to get cynical. It’s time to get busy.

1. “Once Upon a Bankruptcy”; Reader’s Digest; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “Once Upon a Bankruptcy”; Reader’s Digest; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)