



Sermon: The Kingdom Principle
Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30
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Reynoldsburg United Methodist Church
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This weekend we're talking about what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God and to live by the principals of the Kingdom in the here and now. I can remember when I was younger, and I thought that all there was to the Christian life was getting into heaven someday; and as a young person with that focus, much of what I experienced was irrelevant and actually quite boring. But when I finally began to put the pieces together and realized that the life of a Christ-follower is more about living life and that heaven is the icing on the cake, the Christian faith became much more exciting to me.

The Kingdom of God is not a place in the clouds—it is not a dot on the map—it is a reality that is born deep within us when we put Jesus in the place of primary importance in our hearts. When we commit our lives and give them over to Jesus and the benefits of the Kingdom can be realized now—without a moment's hesitation—we can live inside out as a child of the King. The Christian life is not just about getting into heaven someday; it is about the practicality and the daring of living the life of Jesus right now.

How many of you have heard of a 'BHAG' (pronounced BEE-hag)? A BHAG comes from a book that was written by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras entitled "Built to Last," and it is a business term that stands for a **B**ig, **H**airy, **A**udacious **G**oal. In his book, Collins describes it more clearly as a clear, compelling and unifying point of effort that engages people and reaches out and grabs them by the gut and pulls them in the same direction.

During the last several months, I have been having some conversations with some of the leaders of our staff and of our congregation around this question—when was the last time that we challenged our congregation to a BHAG that had something to do with anything other than building a building or retiring a debt? When is the last time we challenged one another to a big, hairy, audacious goal that had to do with anything other than building a building or retiring a debt? And the answer was, "We haven't..." until today. We are going to give you an opportunity to participate in a BHAG—a big, hairy, audacious goal—that can stretch our faith and improve our reach from the inside out.

Before we get to that, we need to understand what it means to live as a citizen of the Kingdom; and to help us do that, we are going to take a look at this parable from Matthew chapter twenty-five. This is a Kingdom parable—Jesus is talking

about the nature of what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom—and it is shared with Kingdom people who desire to live by Kingdom principles.

There is no doubt in the story that there is something required of these three servants. Three of them are entrusted with large sums of money. One receives five talents, the other receives three and the other one receives one from their master. Sometimes we hear the word ‘talent’ and we mistakenly believe that the master is doling out abilities—like singing in the choir or leading worship, playing the piano, teaching in a class—but that is not what he is talking about in this story. That is another story. In this story, the master is doling out large sums of money.

In today’s round numbers, the first servant received two million, the second servant received one million and the third servant received around five hundred thousand dollars; and while he does not say so in the story, the master has expectations of them. So when he returns from his journey, he gathers the three of them together to see what they have done with his money. The first servant walks in and says, “Master, I took your two million dollars and I did well in the market; and I have two million more to give to you.” And the master is thrilled. He says, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a little—I’ll let you be faithful in much. Enter in the joy of your master.”

The second servant comes and she says, “Master, I did pretty well. I took your one million, and I made another million. And now I’m returning it to you.” And he said to her, “Well done, good and faithful servant; because you’ve been faithful with a little, you’ll have the opportunity to be faithful in much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

And then there was this third guy who had taken his portion, dug a hole in the ground and sat on it. It neither gained nor lost. The master blasts the third servant for not taking any risk to try to make something extra with his money, and he takes it away and gives it to the one who had done the best. And then—get this—he calls him a worthless, lazy servant and throws him out into utter darkness where there is weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. Now I have a clue for you—that is not where you want to go for spring break vacation. He casts him out into utter darkness.

I need to tell you this does not seem very fair to me. The master did not say a single word about what they were supposed to do with that money. He did not tell them that they were supposed to invest it and make more. He just gave it out; and if I were that last servant, I might be thinking to myself, “Well, he just gave me the money.” If I were the last servant, I might be pretty upset—I would say something like, “I didn’t do anything wrong! He got back exactly what he gave me in the first place. He didn’t explain anything about what was expected of me, and I didn’t lose what he gave me! He doesn’t have any right to bawl me out.”

So why would the master rebuke the one that played it safe and cast him in outer darkness where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth? I could

understand it if he had lost the money in the market, I could understand if he had gambled it away at the track, I could understand it if he had spent it on his own house or if he trifled it away partying with his friends. Then I might understand that he might deserve the punishment, but this just makes the master look mean. It makes him look cruel. Punishing the one who plays it safe is not the slightest bit fair; and frankly, that is not the picture of Jesus that I like to have.

So let us stop right there and take a step back. What you need to remember is this story uses hyperbole. Jesus is making an exaggeration to make a point. What Jesus is getting at here is that notion that being a follower of Christ means that we take on the ministry with which we have been entrusted, and we do it with all of our being. This is a Kingdom Principle that says that all that we have is a gift from God, and God expects us to use it for His glory. This is a Kingdom Principle that says we are called to partner with God in His mission for the world. We are called to get in line with fulfilling God's great dream and do our part. This is a Kingdom Principle that says that Christ-followers were never intended to be passive.

If we are to follow Jesus, then we are to serve and care and invest ourselves in Kingdom work. We are to take chances, we are to jump in, we are to risk everything for the sake of what God loves. That is God's dream for us—that the day will come that everything that we do will glorify God and grow disciples and change the world...one person at a time. Today, in English, the word 'talent' comes to mean much more than money. We now know that it means that all of the faculties that have been given to us by God—all of our gifts, our abilities, our talents, our resources; and in a nutshell, Jesus is saying, "Use all of who and what you are—all of your financial, your personal, your educational, your inner personal resources—for the glory of God."

We want to give you an opportunity to do just that. I want this parable to be one that you will never forget. We are going to invite you to live a Kingdom Principle—a big, hairy, audacious goal—and to do something that will result in the glorifying of God. We are going to entrust you with some of God's money and are inviting you to partner with Him and one another in the work of the Kingdom of God.

Let me explain this idea. I know what some of you are thinking, "He's crazy!" And if I were sitting where you are and did not know what I know, I would think I was crazy too; but I know in my bones that this is the center of the will of God for us. Before I say another thing, I want you to know that if you do not want to participate in this you can return the money to the church. We do not want anyone to feel forced into this. If you do that—if you chose not to participate in it—do it with a happy heart; I will make a promise to you—we are not going to treat you like the third servant in the story. There will be no casting people out into utter darkness to weep and wail and gnash teeth.

For now, I just like you to hold that money in your hand because I want you to receive it with a sense of intrigue—maybe even gladness—and I want to encourage

you to take these moments to dream about how you might make use of this money to make something more with it.

I know what some of us are thinking. You are thinking, "I can do a lot with this money—especially with gas at \$3.31 a gallon." That is not what this money is for. I have been thinking a great deal about this over the last couple of months, and here are a few possibilities that I have thought of along the way. For example, you could take a chance on a risky stock. I would not do that—but you might. You could chose to put it in your mutual fund and see what it would get.

You can buy the ingredients to bake cookies or pies and sell them to very busy people. You can combine your money with your spouse or friends and throw a dinner party and invite the people in your neighborhood and explain what you are doing and put a basket out and see what God does. You could buy fuel for your chain saw and cut a cord of wood and sell it to somebody. You could make or create a painting or knit a sweater or make a flower arrangement and sell it.

You could buy fuel for your classic car like I have, or you could buy fuel for your motorcycle and sell rides. I know what you could do—you could take an ad out in *The Columbus Dispatch* newspaper and finally get around to cleaning the garage, basement and attic and have the garage sale you need to have and donate all the proceeds back. You could pay for the ingredients of your favorite soup and sell it by the quart. You could sell your tickets to The Ohio State spring football game for more than face value (is this even legal? If not, you didn't hear it from me.) I know none of you have ever done that—ever!

You could buy fuel for your airplane like Dr. Carl has or a boat that you own and sell rides. You could build a little shrine in your family room, and every time you receive a blessing, you could put \$2 in; and every time you say something you would be embarrassed to say in front of the pastor, you could put \$5 in and see what happens. You could spend the \$50 to buy a one-month membership at a fitness club; and every time you go, put \$5 into the kitty and see what happens.

There are a host of possibilities. Many of them are written on the back of the letter that I gave to you. I know that this is different, but I want you to play with this—have fun with this. Take a risk and invest the money to the Kingdom between now and the weekend of May 31st and June 1st.

We want the children of the church to participate in this, too, from Kindergarten to age eighteen. The children who are in Fuel Worship this morning will be getting a certificate—a coupon that looks like this—and you need to take them with the coupon to see Tracy Holstein in Kirsch Hall after this service to pick up their envelope.

We want to encourage you to think boldly. We know that some of you will make things that you will want to sell, so we want to make that possible. On Wednesday

nights and Thursday nights in Kirsch Hall, St. Andrew's Hall and The Way of the Cross, we are going to let people set up tables—there are large numbers of people that come in and out of here on Wednesday and Thursday nights—and if you want to sell something, there is a way to do that which is written on the back of the letter. And Pastor Dave Cady tells us that if you want to do that at Summit Station on Sunday mornings, they will set up their Fellowship Hall so you can do that if you would like.

We need to be very clear about this—this is God's money. It is not yours. This is a loan—it is not a gift. Just like in the parable, it is someone else's money with which you are being entrusted. None of the money you hold in your hand has come out of the church budget. None of the money you hold in your hand has come out of the church's cash reserves. All of the money you hold in your hand—and what we are giving away this weekend—over \$100,000 comes as a donated loan from seven generous families in our church. Is that not incredible? Wonderfully generous people, so if the money is not returned when it is supposed to be, they are out.

A few more things. You have the use of this money for seven weeks. We would like for you to return the money that you have been given today along with any increase on the weekend of May 31st and June 1st during our worship celebrations using the gold envelope that is in your letter in your packet today. You are probably wondering, "Well, what are you going to do with the money?" Let me tell you.

The first thing we are going to do is we are going to pay those seven families back. And the second thing we are going to do, we are going to take everything that is above that and we are going to give one hundred percent away. Twenty-five percent of it is going to feed the hungry in central Ohio. We are going to buy tractor-trailers full of food and give it away.

Twenty-five percent is going to go to the Jackson Area Ministries. We have been partnering with them at WorkCamp for twenty-five years, and they need to build a new headquarters building; and we are going to give it to the headquarters building. Twenty-five percent is going to go to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) for Hurricane Katrina Relief that is still going on today. And twenty-five percent is going to be given to build a church in another country.

Now, I just want you to dream a little bit. Can you imagine what God will do as we partner with Him? We are not talking about a means to an end here—we are talking about the explosion of Kingdom participation that changes our community and can change our world...one person at a time.

On Friday night, I was watching a news documentary show; and they told a story about a high school class in Circleville, Ohio. It was on the front page of the local section of *The Columbus Dispatch* yesterday where a single high school teacher gave \$200 of her own money to twenty high school students and gave them a similar task over a two-month period of time. Do you know that those twenty students

took the \$200 and transformed it into \$7,050 to be used? I dare you to be inspired by that. Can you imagine what God might do in all of these different ventures if we will just jump in and take a risk and live by some Kingdom Principles?

This is new and a little bit different, so let me hit the highlights one more time. Each of us has been entrusted with some of God's money—if this really is not your thing, you can return it on your way out of the worship center today. But our hope is that you will do something during the next seven weeks that will multiply it. Trust your instincts, use your gifts, do something that is uniquely you and return the original money plus the increase in the gold envelope that you have on the weekend of May 31st and June 1st. We will then repay the loan and give all the rest away. One last thing—and this is really important—have fun with this. You are partnering with the King. Do you remember the story how the king commends the shrewd investors? He looks at what they have done with thrill in his heart and says, "Well done—enter into the joy of your master." In other words, "Come on in and share in my happiness."

There should be a multiplying effect to the joy in our lives as we work together to do this. I want you to hold God's money in your hand while we sing this closing song. Jesus is asking us to do something this weekend—He is asking us to be partners in developing and growing the qualities that God treasures. He is asking us to risk giving ourselves to one another. He is asking that we take the risks for people who are hurt and left out as well.

There is an undeniable, insistent will of God that is calling us today. It beckons us to Kingdom work. You might be thinking, "But who are we? Who are we that God should use us?" I will tell you who we are—we are the raw material of greatness. We are the stuff God does miracles with. We are everyday people with scars and skinned hearts, with deadlines and demands, with struggles and fears who have decided to follow Jesus; and if that makes us children of the King, will you live like it?

Today, Jesus is inviting you and me to partner with Him in the Kingdom. Will you accept this BHAG—this big, hairy, audacious goal—and will you accept the assignment of a Kingdom Principle? If you do, it could change your life forever; and it can help change our world...one person at a time. And in the end, we will know that we are blessed.