

THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL

SIX-WEEK QUEST

SERMON OUTLINE 4

PUTTING THE AMERICAN DREAM TO DEATH

MATTHEW 25:14-30

INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

People of all backgrounds come to America and live here in search of the American Dream. But what is "The American Dream"?

- Does it mean equal opportunity for all?
- Does it mean freedom to worship as you wish and express your beliefs?
- Does it mean owning a house?
- Does it mean wages that support a family?
- Does it mean getting rich?

Different values have crept into the American Dream. Some are very good, like freedom, and equal rights for all. But other values seem to conflict with God's Kingdom values. Richard Stearns, in his book, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, says the "American Dream" is "so ingrained in our thinking that most of us embrace it without thinking twice about whether it is consistent with our faith values or whether it might be harmful in any way. But if we scrutinize the values inherent in it, we should begin to feel somewhat uncomfortable with their implications" (203).

INTENSIFY THE ISSUE

What is worse is that some of the unbiblical values of the American Dream have made their way into the church. A growing number of people are disturbed by the values exhibited by the church. Worship has become entertainment, the church has become a shopping mall,

and God has become a consumable product. As one person put it, when Christianity met America, guess who won?

Pastor: Describe your own concerns of how consumerism has infected American Christianity and the church.

And when it comes specifically to money, the American Dream often promotes this view: I worked hard, I earned it, and it's mine to do as I please. Many Christians wouldn't think twice about that statement, but it is clearly an unbiblical and unchristian viewpoint. Let's take a look at what the Bible says about this.

INSTRUCT WITH THE BIBLE

CONTEXT: Before we read today's passage, I'd like to explain a word that is used in this passage. The term "talent" means something very different today from what Jesus meant when He told this parable. A talent was used to indicate a very large sum of money. A talent was actually a measurement of weight, usually applied to precious metals such as gold or silver, though occasionally applied to other metals such as lead, bronze, brass, or iron. A talent of gold, for example, would be worth a whole lot more than a talent of bronze.

While commentators differ somewhat over the approximate value of a talent in today's economy, all would agree that it was a large amount of money. Some say that it was the

equivalent to 20 years' wages for a common laborer. To put this into our economy, if you made, \$30,000 a year, a talent would be the equivalent of about \$600,000 or if you made, \$50,000 a year, a talent would be the equivalent of about one million dollars.

But throughout the centuries the word "talent" became applied not to people's money, but to people's skill or ability. In other words, when Jesus used the word "talent," his audience thought about money. When we use the word "talent," we think about abilities.

This idea that God wants us to use the abilities He has given us for His kingdom obviously is a good and correct idea. But in this parable, the idea is first in reference to how we use the money God has given us. But because the symbol of money in this parable represents all the resources we have been given by God, it can also be applied toward our God-given abilities, time, opportunities, etc.

Let's read Matthew 25:14-30

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.

15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.

17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more.

18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

20 The man who had received the five

talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

21 "His master replied, '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!'

22 "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

23 "His master replied, '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!'

24 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?

27 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.

28 " 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.

29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

1. IT'S NOT OUR MONEY – IT'S GOD'S

In Jesus' time, it was common for wealthy men to take long journeys. Before leaving, they would often delegate the control and multiplication of their wealth to trustworthy servants/employees.

Do you think these employees now thought the money was theirs? Obviously not. They knew the property and money still belonged to the master. He is the owner. They are the managers.

The comparison is obvious. Who does the master represent? God/Jesus. Who do the servants symbolize? You and me.

We are the servants, and God loans His resources to us. Everything belongs to God. Our very lives are on loan from God. Our days are in His hands. God has given us our bodies, mind, personality, and soul. All our possessions, abilities, and days are on loan from Him. God owns this world and everything and everyone in it! This is His world, not ours.

Listen to these verses:

- Genesis 1:1 states, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
- Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."
- Psalm 50:12 says, "For the world is mine, and all that is in it."
- Haggai 2:8 adds, "The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the LORD Almighty."

We really don't own anything. "Our" money is really God's money. He is the owner of it all. This perspective challenges to the core the American value of self-sufficiency – the pick-

up-myself-by-my-bootstraps mentality. But until we actually see our lives and "our stuff" from God's viewpoint, we will mismanage what God has entrusted to us. This leads to our next point.

2. WE ARE ENTRUSTED WITH IT – NOT ENTITLED TO IT

Look again at the parable. Before the master leaves for his long journey, he called his servants and "entrusted his property to them" (v. 14). He handed over his wealth to them and trusted them with it.

To one servant he gives 5 talents, to another 2 talents, and to the third 1 talent. Let's calculate this into today's dollars based on the idea that a talent equals 20 years wages and an annual wage is 30,000 dollars. The master gave the first servant 3 million dollars, the next servant 1.2 million dollars, and the third servant 600,000 dollars.

Even though each servant was given a different amount, every one of them was entrusted with a lot.

Does it bother you that he didn't give each servant the same amount? The reason the master did this is because he knew how much each one could handle. So He gave to each of them, vs. 15 says, "according to his ability." He wasn't going to set them up for failure on the one hand or to be underutilized on the other hand.

Again, let's consider the parallels between this passage and our lives.

First of all, God entrusts you with His stuff. You have what you have because God gave it to you. You aren't entitled to it; rather you are entrusted with it.

Second, God entrusts you with different stuff

and different amounts than He does other people. He knows what you can handle. He hasn't given you too much that you end up failing, and He hasn't given you too little that you are being underutilized. You aren't entitled to any more or any less.

Third, whatever God has given you – even if you think it is just one talent – it is a lot. Your job is to use well and wisely – and to grow – what God has given you.

3. GOD EXPECTS US TO INVEST IN HIS KINGDOM

In verses 19-25, we see that after a long time, the master returns and settles accounts with his servants. We see that the first two servants get the same results and the same rewards. But the third servant does nothing and gets something entirely different.

The first two men went immediately to work and both of them doubled their master's money. The first servant turned 5 talents into 10, and the second servant turned 2 talents into 4.

Both of these servants were eager to work and then excited to show their master the results. They couldn't wait to present what they had done because they wanted to please the owner.

20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

22 "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

The master is equally thrilled with both of them. He says the exact same thing to both of them: "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!"

Let's look at the third servant. First of all he had the ability to double his talent. Also he could have received the same reward as the other two servants. But instead he just buries his talent: "But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money." It was safe, but it wasn't smart.

The master calls him a "wicked, lazy, and worthless servant." And He threw him out into the darkness where there is weeping & wailing & gnashing of teeth.

This could be a very encouraging parable, but it probably worries most of us because we seem to identify with the last servant more than the first two servants. He didn't steal the master's money. He just buried it for safe keeping.

Again, let's look at some of the principles that come out of this for us today.

First, God expects us to work, use what He has given us, and increase His kingdom. He doesn't want us to bury what He has given us for safe keeping. And He certainly wouldn't want us to embezzle what He has given us to build our own kingdom.

Second, whether you have a lot or a little, God is equally happy with those who invest in His Kingdom. The 5 talent servant and the 2 talent servant got the same words and reward.

Third, if you are faithful with what God has given you, He will trust you with even more. The servants who invested in the master's kingdom were given more. "You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things."

If you bury what God has given you, He will even take that away from you eventually. He will give it to someone else who will put it to use. 28" Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 29For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."

IMAGINE THE RESULT

Let me ask you, have you bought into the consumerist values of the American Dream? Who do you believe is the owner of what you have – you or God? Have you felt entitled to or entrusted with what you have? Have you invested more in your kingdom than God's kingdom?

One day we'll have to give an account for how we've used what we've been given. Would you be proud with how you have invested the resources God has loaned to you? Would you be eager to show Him what you have done with it?

God has entrusted you to use what you have to invest in His work. He has given you what you need, and if you are faithful with it, He will give you more to work with. Use well and wisely – and to grow – what God has given you to work with. And definitely don't bury it or embezzle it!

ILLUSTRATE THE APPLICATION

This week I'd like you to join me in seriously thinking about and acting on this question: What do I need to change with my spending, saving, and giving so that one day I will hear these words from my Lord – "You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"?

Pastor: Print this question out for people to take with them.

