



God's Investment in You

Matthew 25:14-30

Sunday, November 19, 2023, Aledo UMC

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Sermon, God's Investment in You

This past summer, Apple TV released a movie called, "The Beanie Bubble," based on the Beanie Baby craze of the 1990s. The film debuted on the Apple before debuting in theaters a week later and it stars Zach Galifianakis and Elizabeth Banks.

Beanie Babies were the brainchild of Ty Inc. By creating a sense of exclusivity and restricting the distribution and lifespan of some of its models, the company prompted many people to treat the little plastic bead-filled furry figures as commodities. The company took full advantage of the rise of the internet, which further stoked the fever among collectors.

Some poured thousands of dollars into acquiring Beanie Babies, viewing their caches of the plushies as investments that might fund retirement or college.

That was the case for one man whose son 10 years ago made a short documentary about \$100,000 of the family's money being used to buy thousands of the toys, only to have them plummet in value and sit in storage bins years later. The purchases had been meant to pay for college for three children.

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Of course, a tiny handful of people did get rich off of the craze, including company owner and CEO Ty Warner, who made billions and went on to add the Four Seasons Hotel New York to his portfolio.¹

The Beanie Baby fad is a fascinating study in investment strategy. Investment strategy is not a new concept. One of the most familiar parables of Jesus is all about investment strategy, and it's found in Matthew 25.

¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five [talents], 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 five [talents] went at once and put his money to work and gained five more [talents]. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two [talents] gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received 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 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 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 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 gold 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 “‘So take the [talent] from him and give it to the one who has ten [talents]. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

I've used the original word “talent” rather than the more modern phrase, “bag of gold.” Our modern word *talent* in the sense of gifts or skills that an individual possess is derived from this Gospel parable. A *talent* was a unit of money, worth roughly what a laborer could earn in 15 years. That means that one talent would be worth anywhere between half a million dollars and a million dollars. It's a significant investment.

Nearly every sermon I've ever heard—or preached—from this passage focused on the third servant who buried his talent, leading to a rather obvious application. But at least he didn't invest in Beanie Babies!

Among other things, this passage is also about investing and receiving a return on our investments.

¹ <https://www.investmentnews.com/investing-lessons-from-the-beanie-babies-bubble-240515>. Accessed November 16, 2023.

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I've already mentioned Apple. According to Kiplinger Personal Finance, Apple has been the best company to invest in over the past 30 years, having created \$2.67 trillion in wealth with an annualized weighted return of 23.5 percent. What was the secret to Apple's success? It can be boiled down to one simple truth: there have been enough people who have believed in Apple over a long enough period of time that they have continued investing in that company, thereby giving Apple the opportunity to thrive. In other words: When you believe in something, you see value in that something. And when you see value in something, you invest in that something.

People invested in Beanie Babies because they believed in them, and they believed that their investment in Beanie Babies would finance their children's college education or their retirement. Unfortunately, their belief was misguided and their investments failed.

Others invested in Apple because they believed in that company, and their belief has paid off.

Investing is always an act of faith. A farmer invests his seed into the ground by faith, believing that come harvest, he will see a significant return on his investment.

Two years ago here at Aledo UMC, we changed our approach to investments. We had already created an endowment fund, but it was not set up to create income for the General Fund of our Church. At this point, our Endowment is rather small, about \$90,000 or the equivalent of three months' budget.

One-third is invested locally at Black Hawk Bank; the other two-thirds are invested with the United Methodist Foundation.

Last month, we received a check from the United Methodist Foundation for \$2,100—the first proceeds from our endowment, and it's money which we didn't have to put in the plate. It's equivalent to one-third of what we need every week to meet our budget.

Where did the money come from? One of the best ways to grow our Endowment is through estate planning. I encourage you to include Aledo UMC in your will or in your life insurance plan. Why not consider giving a final tithe? That would be just ten percent of your estate. But that gift will generate new income for Aledo UMC every year forever.

This past year, our endowment received several memorial gifts. For example, our United Methodist Men have established a policy of giving \$50 to our endowment fund whenever one of the men of our church dies. This past year, Mark Dunn, Charley Thomas, George Korns, Curt Whitehall, Bud Thompson, and Chuck Luallen all passed away and our UM Men gave a \$50 memorial to our Endowment Fund for each one. That \$300 will never be spent, but those gifts given in their memory will generate income for the church until Jesus Christ returns. And those are not the only gifts given to our Endowment Fund this year.

That's just one way in which we may invest in the Kingdom of God. But let's take a closer look at the Parable of the Talents. The three servants were given talents which they were expected to invest for the sake of their . Of course, only the first two did so, and they doubled their talents.

But they weren't the only active investors in the story. Investing began with the man who went on a journey and invested his talents in his servants. The man, of course, is Jesus Christ, and he presents this parable after he had denounced the scribes and Pharisees beginning in chapter 23. Indeed, the religious establishment may very well have been represented by the wicked servant who hid his master's talent in the ground. After all, they had been given the law of Moses and the Temple which was the sign of God's presence among them. They had been given wonderful promises about

how God would bless not only Israel but, through Israel, the whole world. And they had buried them in the ground. They had turned the command to be the light of the world into an encouragement to keep the light for themselves. They had been worthless slaves. And now their Master, Jesus the Christ, was calling them into account and the threatened destruction of the Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD was to be seen as the master's punishment on the scribes and Pharisees—the servant who had not done his will.²

If the scribes and Pharisees are the third, unfaithful servant, then who are the other two? Quite simply they are the ones who heart the call of Christ and obey. They are the fishermen who followed Jesus. They are the tax collectors and prostitutes who Jesus said in Matthew 21:31 are entering the kingdom of God ahead of the scribes and Pharisees.

The sad fact is that God had invested so much in the scribes and Pharisees, and they turned out to be a disappointment. But they weren't the only ones in whom God had invested. God was also heavily invested in those lowly fishermen and despised tax collectors and those marginalized prostitutes, and the list goes on and on and on.

For that matter, God is heavily invested in you, just as God is heavily invested in me. Consider the words of John in his first epistle:

[Behold} what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

God has invested his life in us; how can we possibly repay him for all he has done for us? Indeed, God is heavily invested in us for a purpose.

Two weeks ago the Chicago Cubs shocked the baseball world when they hired former Brewers manager Craig Counsell to manage the Cubs. In doing so, they committed the team to investing \$40 million in Craig Counsell over the next five years. By the way: that's the equivalent of 50 talents.

This past Monday, Craig Counsell was introduced in his new role during a press conference at Wrigley Field. And after he put on the jersey for his new team, I love what he said: "You walk into Wrigley on your first day as a Cub and you already know that it means something. You walk into the history, and you walk into the energy, and you already know it demands your best."

Friends, that's just Wrigley Field. How much more should entering into the Kingdom of God impact you. You enter into the history; you enter into the energy, and you know that the Kingdom of God demands your best.

God wants a return on his investment. But God hasn't given us money; he's given us something more precious: he's given us love. So how are we going to multiply that love? What is our best? It is to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And one of the most effective ways to do that is to love your neighbor as yourself.

Let us pray.

² NT Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, Vol. 2, pg. 138.