

SERMONS FROM ST. MATTHEW'S

k – TRADE Matthew 25:14-30

If you watch television or surf the internet you will learn that investing your financial resources successfully is as easy as, well, taking a nap in your crib. After all, in the e-Trade commercials we are shown that a baby, as yet not even potty-trained, plus a laptop computer equals success in the world of personal finance. All you need as a guide is e-Trade. Alternatively, if baby-talk scares you, you can simply follow the magic green line to financial security. Unfortunately no one has gotten the message to the guys in the suits who lie awake at night worrying about their over-leveraged businesses and bankrupt cities and countries.

Perhaps, if we want to be a little less cavalier about our investing we might rather consult *Dummies.com*. Yes, they are the same folks who publish those distinctive yellow and black books with titles ranging from *Potty-Training for Dummies* to *Neurosurgery for Dummies*. When it comes to investing our resources several elements of their advice have a biblical ring to them.

1. *Before you invest in anything, you first must make sure that you have a strong foundation. If you don't, your situation is like building a brick house on shifting sand.*
2. *One behavior that separates successful investors from unsuccessful ones is reading. Just as in almost every discipline, people who read more learn more and gain more benefit.*
3. *More often than not, the herd mentality is wrong. Think as a contrarian investor.*
4. *Discipline is your ally in stock investing. Frequently, investors lose money or destroy their wealth as they let their emotions rule.*

Whether it is “electronic-trading” or “kingdom-trading” those four elements comprise a wise approach to investing. Each of them has a biblical basis that is also fundamental to investing in the kingdom of God, what we might term “k-Trading” or in more familiar language, “stewardship.”

1. There is no substitute for a firm foundation. Jesus, himself, advised his followers that they must build on the firmest of foundations. In Mark 10 he said,

²⁴“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!” (Matthew 7:24-27)

Any investment in the kingdom of God must be based on the will and nature of God who was most fully revealed in his Son, Jesus Christ – the incarnate Word.

2. The second element of wise investing is to be a reader of the works that pertaining to investing. When it comes to the kingdom of God, if we are to be productive citizens of the kingdom we must be dedicated and avid readers of God's Word. As we pray in today's collect:

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP, p. 236)

This prayer tells us that if we are to be informed in the ways of God and his kingdom we must read, mark, learn and inwardly digest his Word. In the wilderness when Satan was tempting Jesus to make a bad investment, Jesus quoted these words from Deuteronomy (8:3):

"It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)

3. When we come to the third element of good investing, "*Think as a contrarian investor,*" the natural response is... "Are you kidding?" But before you are repulsed by the term "contrarian," think about the charge to the Christian to live in the world but not be of the world. It is not a matter of being "contrary" just to be contrary or to maliciously thwart the plans of others, but rather to have your thinking and behavior controlled by kingdom principles rather than worldly wisdom. St. Paul put it this way to the Romans:

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

There is no substitute in the k-Trade for discerning the will of God, and the only way we can accomplish that discernment is to have our minds and thinking transformed contrary to the world.

4. Finally, "Discipline is your ally in...investing." As in stock investing, for a citizen of the kingdom of God, discipline is of fundamental importance. The true power of the life of worship is not in how it makes us feel but in how it makes us think. Jesus' message was, "*Repent, for the kingdom of God has come near*" (Matthew 4:17). It is the discipline of repenting of our own ways and conforming to the ways of God that allows us to experience God's kingdom even in this world. With confession we are to

dedicate ourselves to the development of holy habits that will show forth the fruits of the Spirit.

The one who would invest in the kingdom of God must start with the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, be dedicated to reading God's Word every day, refuse to conform to worldly thoughts and attitudes and be a Christian disciple – a disciplined follower of our Lord.

The parable of the talents is a story about taking what God has given us and investing it for the King. The parable asks each of us the question: "What have you done with your talents and treasure?" Have you invested in the kingdom based on your knowledge and trust of God? Or, have you buried them in the things of the world based on the herd-mentality of fallen humankind and your lack of trust in God? For the answer, compare your checkbook and your pledge card – as you do so, may your conscience be your guide.

Let us pray.

Lord God, you are so generous and due to your generosity we enjoy the gifts that make our lives worth living. May our gratitude be made manifest by how we use your gifts in this life in order to make your kingdom known and to witness to the goodness of you, our King. Your Son bought us from bondage and sin by his blood, may we die to selfishness and worldly desires by investing all we are and all we have in the prospering of your kingdom. Guide us by your Holy Spirit so that we will live faithful lives so that we might know your eternal presence even in this life. Amen.

Taken from a sermon preached by the Reverend Charles D. Alley, Rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia on November 13, 2011, the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 28, Year A.

Introduction:

On this Sunday closest to Veterans' Day, we honor our veterans and give honor and thanks for those who invested their very lives so that we might enjoy freedom and relative peace. Their investment and the Parable of the Talents direct our thoughts toward the importance of investing wisely during this life.