

Rich Nathan
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Evangelism: The Heart of the Father
Matt. 25:14-30

A Church That Multiplies Itself

This morning what I want to do is to continue in a series that I started several weeks ago on the Heart of the Father. I mentioned to you back some several weeks ago that the reason why I was doing this particular series is because I want to lay a foundation in this church regarding basic motivation about what we are doing this summer in our Harvest Summer.

Now, our guests don't know this, so I need to explain. At the end of this summer our church is planning to do a large festival for four days in August where we will have food and some bands in from outside as well as some homegrown talent. We are going to have line dancing and country music as well as a guest speaker to come. All of the activity is designed to assist you and me in introducing friends, co-workers, fellow students, children, and family members to a relationship with Jesus.

It is my concern that we really understand some things as we move forward in this summer that we, as a church, are devoting to evangelism. It is absolutely crucial as a church that we not sink into institutional self-preservation, which is going to be what I will be talking about today. It is so important that The Vineyard does not simply just try to preserve what we have. Hold on. Build a nice little wall around the church. We must give away what we have. You know, Jesus said, regarding Christians, that we are the "salt of the earth." And as one observer noted some years ago, in too many churches all of the salt is in the salt shaker and it never gets spread around. Now, you know when you collect a tremendous amount of salt in one place and don't spread it around, that place can become very dead. The Dead Sea in Israel is a place where salt is not spread around; it is all collected in one place.

So, one of the things that I am concerned about on a regular basis with this church is that we continue to spread the salt around. That we get the salt out of the shaker. We can so much enjoy the life of church that we forget that we have a purpose to bring increase in the kingdom of God.

Well, today we are going to be talking about multiplying.

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. 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. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those savants returned and settled accounts with them. 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.'

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.'

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

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.'

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

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? 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.'

'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 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. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Now, before I deal with the theme of multiplication, by way of introduction, I must explain to you the meaning of this word "talent." In its original context, a talent was in Jesus' day, first of all a measure of weight. It was somewhere between sixty and eighty pounds. And after it was a unit of weight, it became a unit of coinage, somewhere around 6,000 denarii. Now, because you cannot transfer values from one culture to another very simply, what is a denarii worth in Jesus' day versus what a dollar is worth in the American economy, about the best you can do is to say that what we are talking about here by one talent is the sum of money a worker in Jesus' day would have earned in twenty years of labor. So, if you figure that the average worker today makes \$30,000, then a talent in terms of earning power today would be about \$600,000 of earning power.

When the New International Version (NIV) says in the note, those of you have NIV Bibles, in a note at the bottom of the text it says, "A talent is more than a \$1000" that is quite right. It is significantly more than a \$1000, about \$600,000. The Master is obviously very wealthy – he handed out about five million dollars. So we're talking about a very wealthy, very generous man.

Now, our English word "talent" which refers to special abilities, special gifts, whether natural or spiritual, things like musical gifts, artistic talent, speaking ability is actually taken from this parable. We got the word "talent" from this story of talents, which originally referred to a sum of money. People are always asking, "Well, what was Jesus specifically meaning when he said that a master entrusted talents to his servant? Is he simply talking about money or is he referring to our unique gifts? Special abilities? What exactly do the talents symbolize?"

I believe that Jesus is being deliberately vague because he is referring to the whole of our lives so generously given to us by God. I believe your talents, in reference

to this text, can refer to your opportunities for service. I believe they include your time. I believe you could apply this parable to your money. I believe it could apply to your abilities. I believe it could apply to your intellect, to your emotional life, to your relationships, to your attitudes, to your strength, to your health. A talent is anything that you have been given that can be used for the multiplication of the kingdom of God – whatever you have. Anything that you have – artistic ability, the ability to repair cars. Whatever you are or have is a talent that can be used to multiply the Kingdom of God.

Now the reason why I like this parable so much is because I take it as a touch stone for really understanding a good deal of what we are to do as a church and how we Christians are really to understand all that we have been given by God for use in this life. I take this story to be very fundamental, a key that expresses to us a good deal of the meaning of life and the meaning of church.

One of the keys to understanding the meaning of church and the meaning of life is that life and church are for investment and multiplication, not for conservation or preservation. We will be exploring this concept in a talk that I have entitled, “A Church that Multiplies Itself.” Let’s pray.

Well, we are looking at this parable of the talents and what I would like to do is begin this discussion of a church that multiplies itself by looking at the good church, or in this story, the good and faithful servant and what is it that makes a church or a servant, an individual like you, a good and faithful servant.

What I have done on your outline is set up three pairs of items that contain opposing concepts. The first opposing concept that I see is the concept of ownership over against the concept of stewardship. In this story there is a key word that is mentioned in verse 14 and then again in verses 20 and 22. That key word is “entrusted”. Verse 14 we read, *“Again it will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.”* Then, in verse 20 we read, *“The man who received the five talents brought the other five. Master, he said, you have entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.”* Literally, the man with five talents said in the original Greek, “Master, five talents you have placed in my hands.”

Now, what we are talking about is a whole view of life in which we either see that we are working for ourselves, that we are the masters of the house and everything ought to be going into our pockets so that we can line our pockets with the fruit of our labor that we earned. We either see ourselves as owners, masters, or we see ourselves as working on behalf of another, using what has been put into our hands, entrusted to us by another, having to give account to another.

The whole business of the word “talent” is a little shorthand expression for a line of demarcation between ownership on the one hand and stewardship on the other. And this is a line of demarcation, which on the one hand has a wicked servant, a bad church, and an unfaithful church. And on the other hand has good servants, good churches, churches that will be blessed and will have the hand of God with them for a long time. Bad churches and wicked servants basically understand life, their talents, opportunities, money, intellect, skills, careers, children as things and people, as possessions, which we own. Wicked servants are always owners. In essence, wicked churches and servants are embezzlers because they take the talents that have been entrusted to them in the form of God’s gifts and we line our own pockets with them.

Now, in the church an owner mentality will sound like a pastor who speaks of the church as “my church.” A leader who speaks of ministry as “my ministry.” A person who speaks of the folks they care for as “my people.” Owners are very controlling. They

control the church, demand conformity, control the flow of spiritual gifts. Churches where there is a lot of politics or power plays in decision-making. Churches where the Holy Spirit is not given free reign to lead. Churches where people are manipulated, places where there is an ownership mentality, not a stewardship mentality. We are talking about embezzlement. Grabbing what belongs to God, like his church, and acting like it belongs to us. Owners embezzle credit from the Lord. God does something in a ministry time and then, of course, in the retelling of the story rather than Jesus being the hero, coming through at the last moment, we are the heroes or heroines. We came through in the last moment with the correct word, the appropriate prayer, the right bit of counsel, and the money that was necessary at just the right moment. Owners of talents are embezzlers because we steal and embezzle the glory and the credit that belongs to God the Father, the master of the house and we are claiming it for ourselves. Are you ever guilty of embezzling what belongs to God?

Now, this ownership principle runs so deeply in us, we do not see ourselves as simply recipients of God's generosity, with no credit to us. We even see this in the way we respond to compliments. If someone comes up to you and tells you that they believe that you are a very gifted speaker or musician or artist, whatever you happen to be gifted in, counseling, gifted cook, a wonderfully gifted mother—how do you respond to that compliment?

Typically, we who are owners and embezzlers, we all are, we all are taking what belongs to God and claiming it for ourselves, typically we blush or we feign modesty—I am really not that good of a cook; Oh, there was something wrong with the food over here; Oh, I really am not that good of a speaker. Because we think that people and their compliments are ascribing some great quality to us that originates with us rather than them ascribing some great quality in us that is something we received, for which we are no more responsible than we are for the beautiful color of the sky or the grandeur of the Grand Canyon.

But this ownership notion runs so deeply in the American soul that we will boast and claim credit for ridiculous things like the attributes of our cars. We hear teenage boys sit around in a parking lot and argue about whose car is better. They will take credit for the power of their car. My car can go from 0-60. Oh, my car is so much better. As if they manufactured the car. As parents we constantly see ourselves taking way too much credit for our kids' successes, as if we gave them their talents, and entirely too much blame for their failures, as if they have no choices.

In the United States, honestly friends, I believe we have just become a nation of owners - embezzlers who have embezzled every gift of God and claimed it for ourselves. How is that? Well, have you not heard people claim a right to do what they want with their own bodies when it is in reference to the life of the unborn? As if a woman owns a baby being formed in her womb? We own. This baby is not a gift from God, to be cared for. A person who cannot be owned. People no longer speak about their lives as a sacred trust. God gives life and God alone has the right to take life. Now folks like Dr. Kevorkian believe in a constant right to commit suicide. We own our own breath.

Friends, you know, it is really funny how this issue of ownership in the United States right now applies only to the good things of life but not, in any way, to the bad things. I mean if you listen to someone describe the good things in their life; they will often sound like owners. I did this. I achieved that. This is my body and this is my church. This is my ministry. This is what I am going to do with my decisions and my

future, my career, my job. But when it comes to the bad things and bad decisions we made, bad consequences from our bad actions, we Americans no longer own those things.

Let me give you a little illustration. If you were to go down to a local prison and you began to ask prisoners, "How did you end up here?" You would hear statements like this:

Prisoner #1 would say, "I am here because I grew up in a really bad family. Dad was an alcoholic."

Prisoner #2 would say, "I am here because I fell in with a bad crowd. I had bad friends."

Prisoner #3 would say, "I am here because I had a neurosis" or especially if they were psychologized. "I have this addiction."

The truth is that we have chosen in the United States right now to take no ownership of the bad in our lives, but only the good. Regarding the bad, we are simply victims who have been pushed around, influenced, directed by bad people, by abusive people, by hurtful people, but we do not in any way have the responsibility or bottom-line ownership for our problems.

Do you realize, friends, that the Bible tilts the thing exactly in the other direction? And while the Bible does recognize abusive people and victimizers and people who are hurtful, nevertheless, by and large, when it comes to the bad in life, it calls you to own that. To own your sin. To say the reason I am in a bad situation by and large is because of my choices and who I am. On the other hand regarding the good in life, the Bible says that that was given to you as a gift. You are a steward. This is a grace.

You say, "That sounds rather harsh, Rich. How is it that I should only own the bad and not the good?"

The reason why we can own the bad, (and this is not in any way a harsh statement) is because we Christians understand that God is willing in the sending of his Son, Jesus, to take over ownership of the bad for us. You see, the meaning of the cross is that Jesus who never did any bad, who didn't commit any sin is willing to come along side of us and say to us, "If you simply acknowledge your sin, if you confess your bad choices and bad responses, I will take responsibility for them." But you know until you own your sin, until you stop blaming your friends, your ex-spouse, your parents for your choices, you can never transfer ownership to Jesus? We can't confess the sins of another. We can't confess our Dad's sins, our ex-husband's sin, and our kids' sins. We can forgive another's sin, but we can only confess our own sins. And if you want God to not only be the owner of the good in your life, but of the bad in your life, then you must say, "God, regarding the bad...okay. I do take ownership of that and then I transfer it to you."

I do believe that good churches and good and faithful servants are churches and servants that see regarding all of the opportunities and all of the people and all of what is called here "talents" are simply God-given trusts to us. We must constantly be aware of embezzling; we must constantly give the credit to God. To remind ourselves to say "thank you". When complimented, we praise God. When we get done with a task, we turn immediately in our heart and we give the glory to God. As stewards, church leaders must constantly try to not take control, but to give control back to the Holy Spirit. When we look at our careers, we are saying, "God, what do you want?" When we look at our future, we are saying, "God, I am loose change in your pockets. Do with us according to your will."

When we look at ministry, we say, "God, direct." We look at the church and we say, "It is yours, Oh Lord." Stewardship.

Here is a second pair of items that distinguish a good servant from a bad one. And that is a view of obedience today versus obedience tomorrow. In verse 16 we read, *“that the man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work.”* The good servant went to work at once. Right away. You know, good servants and good churches have a healthy level of urgency about obeying God. We hear God saying continually regarding the use of our talents, “Use them now. Do it now. Don’t delay. Don’t wait.”

See, I believe that bad servants and bad churches are deceived by Satan who constantly says to you and to me, “It is okay if you wait on obedience. I know that you are hearing the voice of God now, but just wait. Don’t respond right now. Do your duty later.” The good servant in this story took the five talents and at once began to work with them.

Friends, the Spirit of God is always prodding a person to immediate obedience. The Spirit of God is always pushing you to obey right now. It may be a little thing like pick up your Bible in the morning and begin to read, now. Pray now.

But the enemy comes along and says, “You don’t need to read your Bible right now even though you heard the voice of the Spirit. No, don’t read your Bible now, read the newspaper instead and a little later you can read your Bible.”

“You don’t need to pray now, you will always find time later in the day to pray. Put it off.”

Don’t forgive right now when you feel that conviction of the Holy Spirit that you need to forgive this person that you are angry with. No. Delay and harbor some bitterness for a while. Fantasize revenge. Tomorrow, tomorrow you will obey.

You know, the Lord spoke to me some years ago very clearly when I was struggling with a particular issue in my life whether I should obey him or not. And the Lord spoke to me, not in any kind of audible voice but in my mind I had a very strong impression of the Lord saying, “Rich, what is it about tomorrow that will make obedience any easier than it is today? What makes tomorrow any different?” The great lie is don’t confront right now a family member who is an alcoholic. It will be much easier to deal with the problem tomorrow.

We always find regarding fundamental problems that fundamental problems do not just go away. They just get worse. Tomorrow will be harder, actually, than today. But the lie is always delay. Delay the difficult thing. Delay the active obedience. Certainly, when you are contemplating giving your life to Jesus Christ, it is the Spirit of God who will be saying to you, “Do it now. Commit now.” But it is the enemy who comes along and says, “Wait. You can always commit tomorrow, the next day, next week.”

The same thing is true about evangelism. The Holy Spirit says share your faith now. Say something now. Speak up now. But this other voice comes in – now is not a good time; wait for a more convenient moment; keep your mouth shut.

Good servants and good churches always have an urgency about them in which now is the time for obedience. Now is the time for commitment. Now is the time for giving. Now is the time to communicate the gospel. And bad servants are always listening to the voice of the enemy that says, “Don’t worry. Delay.” We are lied to. We are often told that now is a particularly hectic time. Now is a particularly difficult time. Now is a particularly stressful time. Generally speaking, I have found that life is always busy. If your life is anything like mine, life is always hectic. Life always has a lot of demands. Life is always stressful. The fact is, I don’t know about you, but my life does

not have a pause button on it like a VCR. It is a total deception to believe that you are going to find the pause button this summer or the pause button this fall; the truth is there is no pause button in life. The Lord says to you and to me obey His voice right now.

And good servants always show great enthusiasm about the coming of the Lord over against excuses as we contemplate his coming. It says in verse 19, "After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five and said, 'Master, you entrusted me with five talents, see I have gained five more.'"

These two verses are talking about the return of the Lord and the fact that at the return of the Lord, there is an accounting for what we have done with our money, our gifts, our time and our opportunities to serve God. And the good servant volunteers an accounting. It doesn't come out as clearly in the English as it does in the Greek. In the Greek there is a great enthusiasm as the good servant and the good church runs to the Lord with the expression, "Look, master, your five talents has gained five more. Look."

You know, I believe good servants and good churches live with a continual sense of accountability to the owner. One of the things that dulls us out regularly is the notion that our present choices regarding our opportunities, regarding our money, regarding our obedience—that our present choices really don't matter to anyone at all and don't ultimately get noticed by God. I don't know anything that sobers me up more quickly than the remembrance that I must give an account. That one day God will open up the books and every one of my choices will be in the books. All the credits are going to be there and all the debits. It will all be there and I will have to give an account for my words, for my thoughts, for what I have done with God's generosity to me.

Now, I am not talking about salvation here. Salvation is a free gift given to any who will receive God's gift of salvation by faith. To be saved, all one needs to do is turn to God believing that Christ died for your sins and receive him into the depth of your soul as Lord. To be saved, one must simply believe and receive.

But salvation doesn't do away with judgment. The Bible is quite clear that even for believers who will be saved, there is an accounting for our works. There will be an impartial, absolutely fair judgment concerning what we do with what God has given to us. And good servants and good stewards live with this enthusiastic appreciation of a day of accounting, a day of reckoning. We are looking forward to share with God the story of what we have done. To open it up and say, "God, look. Look at your church. Look at my kids. Look at my marriage. Look."

On the other hand, the bad servant and the bad church are always making excuses. How do you think about the Lord coming back and looking over your life, your choices, and your use of your talents? I know that when I am walking in the shadows, the thought of the Lord's coming is very unpleasant to me. When I am walking in the shadows and I am being negligent and I am sinning, I feel very defensive and I make excuses like the bad servant did.

When I am walking in obedience and in the light, I love the thought of the Lord's appearing. It is a good thing on your basic choices to ask yourself, "How is this going to appear to God on the day when I have to give an account?"

Am I going to feel like I will be making a lot of excuses or will I feel like God, seeing through all of my motives and looking into my heart, will know that I tried to do the right thing?

Let me turn to a discussion of the wicked servant. The wicked servant is a man or woman, a church that conserves and preserves its talents and will not spend or risk. It

says in verse 24, *“The man who received the one talent came and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a hard man harvesting where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t gathered seed. So I was afraid and I went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’”*

Do you know what kind of person I think is being spoken of here? I think of a person who decides to live life as an observer. Who stands on the sidelines and will not commit because commitment means to give one’s self. To enter into the fray. To risk and possibly risk injury and loss. Certainly to risk a loss of control. And so this person stands on the sidelines as an observer and as a critic believing that in that way they will be safe, they can be above it all, they will not be hurt, they do not have to be vulnerable.

You know, you cannot be a good servant unless you take your life and fling it like a poker chip into the game, unless you commit, unless you risk, unless you open up, unless you are vulnerable, to risk being a small group leader, to risk sharing your faith, to be vulnerable. Friends, I am personally so tired of speaking to uncommitted critics about what we do as a church, answering the questions of the uncommitted. Dealing with people’s comments and their judgments about why we do what we do in evangelism. Why we do what we do in healing. Why we do what we do in worship or in music.

There are very legitimate questions asked by genuine seekers; I am not speaking about that. I am talking about the comments of the uncommitted. This is a particularly bad quality of my generation and the one following Baby Boomers and Busters. We always stand back as observers and as critics. As people on the sidelines with our arms folded believing that in that posture we are really superior Christians when in fact we would be better classed as wicked servants. Invest yourself. Throw your lot in. Yes, I know, someone somewhere hurt you; you are gun shy. But after checking things out, after looking things over, you need to get off the bench and play the game by committing to ministry. After thinking and praying and listening to God, good servants commit. Invest yourself.

But America now is the army of the radically uncommitted, is it not? Men who will not commit to marriage or a relationship. Politicians who will not commit themselves to a certain policy choice. Ball players who will not commit 100% effort for a team they play for. Employees who cannot commit to a corporation or an organization. A whole country full of fearful people who cannot and will not commit, and yet who stand back on the sidelines like this wicked servant and who judge.

This wicked servant ultimately not only stands back and looks at life as an observer, as an observer of ministry rather than a committed participant; as an observer of church rather than a committed participant, but also projects onto God this great lie when he sees, *“Master, I knew you were a hard man harvesting where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t scattered seed.”*

Rather than seeing that God is one who gave all of the talents, who entrusted us with extraordinary riches, this man says, *“God you are like Pharaoh, very stingy, trying to take where you haven’t really given.”*

You know, isn’t it a strange thing that we constantly project onto God our own failings and our own guilty feelings? That we would say to God, *“God, you are trying to reap, to harvest where you haven’t sown and gather where you haven’t scattered seed.”* And I can hear the Lord say, *“Rich, you may be like that. People in your church may be like that. But I am not like that.”*

For the truth is that we human beings are always trying to harvest where we haven’t been sowing. We are like that, but not God. And yet we project onto God what

we are like. The fact is we always try to reap what we have not sown. I think of parents, older parents, who try to reap affection and respect and close family ties and are saying about their children, “Why do my children not visit me? Why do my children not shower me with respect now that they’re out of the house? Why do my children not want to gather here at holidays?” When those same parents did not sow love, but rather sowed abuse or neglect. They sowed aloofness. They sowed anger. And now they ask, “Why don’t you call me? Why don’t you write to me? Why don’t you see me?” People are always trying to reap what they haven’t sown.

How many husbands want to reap from their wives a hot sexual relationship at night, when there has been no sowing of communication during the day? No sowing of respect? No sowing of affection? No sowing of touch? And then, of course, there is the anger. Why can’t I reap now? Because, husband, you haven’t been sowing.

How many workers try to reap a good income, the good life, the big house, and the dream car? I want to reap a large income. But you haven’t been sowing in terms of worker’s training, in terms of discipline in education in getting your degree, in working faithfully at a job.

We want to reap a great body, yet we won’t sow exercise. We Christians constantly want to reap fruit, good fruit, even though we sow weeds into our lives. And churches are just the same. We think that God is holding back on us and won’t give us new converts even though there has been no sowing, no efforts, no evangelism, no money spent, no sacrifice. We want to reap leaders even though the church doesn’t train leaders, doesn’t envision leaders, and doesn’t encourage leaders. We want to reap unity even though we sow gossip.

And so this wicked servant projects onto God this view of sowing and reaping that is all too human. But God is exactly the opposite. God never asks for what he first has not invested in. He has too much integrity for that.

But the worst characteristic of this wicked servant is just a simple misunderstanding of the Christian life. His view of the Christian life and the kingdom of God is that the goal is to simply preserve and conserve what he has been given rather than to multiply it. Verse 25: *“I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.”*

Is what God wants from your life simply that you don’t lose what he has given you? That view of the Christian life is all too common – being a good Christian means that you don’t do any harm. That you don’t lose what you have. That view of the Christian life suggests that the way we measure a good day is today, God, I had a good day because I didn’t sin too radically. I didn’t lose your investment.

Friends, I will tell you can stay in bed all day and not lose God’s investment. If the goal of being a good Christian is simply to do no harm, then a rock can meet that goal. You don’t need a human being to do no harm; an inanimate object will serve God just as well. What a low goal. I didn’t lose what you gave to me God. I didn’t do any harm to anybody. And yet that is many people’s view of the good Christian life. I am a good Christian because I didn’t commit adultery and I didn’t get drunk. And I didn’t hurt anyone and I didn’t blow my stack.

Jesus was not commended because he went around Galilee doing no one any harm. Jesus was commended because he went around Galilee doing good.

Note this well: the reason this wicked servant is condemned is not because of notorious sin. He was condemned because he failed to use the opportunities given to him. He failed to do good. He failed to bring increase. He failed to multiply the

Master's investment. Verse 26 and 27: *"His master replied, 'You wicked servant, so you knew I harvest where I haven't sown and gather where I haven't scattered seed, well then, you should have put my money on deposit with bankers so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'"*

The Lord doesn't really care that the Vineyard has done no harm today. He asks, "What have you done that is good? That has brought increase? That has multiplied the Kingdom of God? What have you done to spread the salt? To influence your community? To rescue the Lost?"

A bad church and a person who radically misunderstands being a Christian is just looking for a little bit of an escape when they think about Christianity. Yes, we just want a little bit of comfort. What do I want out of Jesus? Oh, a shock absorber. I know that life is hard. I know that I am going to have trials and tribulations and difficulties and I just want someone, some thing to absorb some of the shock, to be a buffer. To bring a little bit of comfort in this very difficult world. I just want a pillow. You know, someone or something to dull the pain a little bit.

"What do I get out of Christianity?" The bad church, the wicked servant says, I get escape. A way to run away from the world and a way to run away from my problems. To get a little bit of buzz in church. Jesus Christ does not call men or women or churches into escapism, into getting a little bit of comfort or a buzz. Jesus Christ will not be our shock absorber. Jesus Christ calls us to make a great commitment to a great cause. The cause of rescuing men and women for God.

Did you sign up for a great cause when you gave your life to Christ? And if you are considering giving your life to Christ, do you understand that you will be signing up for a great cause? Not just a great God, but a great cause in this world? To invest your life, to not stand on the side line, to not be an observer, to throw your lot in, to commit yourself, to risk.

Let me funnel all of my remarks about the talents, about the good servants and the wicked servants, the good churches and the bad churches to two simple principles: To whom much is given, much will be required.

I believe as a church God the great owner of the Vineyard as in his sovereign freedom decided to give much to this particular body, this church, the church you are a part of. We are one of the five or six largest Protestant churches in central Ohio. And I believe we are one or two of the fastest growing Protestant churches, evangelical churches, in central Ohio. I could be wrong. We could only be in the top three. And God has brought together in this church an extraordinary number of very gifted and talented people. People who have much to contribute. I say these things to you as a church in no way to boast, what we are is simply a gift of God; I say this to increase our sense of responsibility before God. And to say to us all: God forbid that we, as a church, should rest on our laurels or say that it is good enough to just hold pat, to just hold tight. "We have enough people! Our community has no needs." God forbid we would stop calling for increasing levels of sacrifice and holiness and prayer and responsibility. To stop calling people to a high bar Christianity.

For to whom much is given, much will be required. Those of you who are economically wealthy, you have money, I am talking to those in the church who are making more than \$40,000, more than \$50,000 a year, you have listened to my sermons. You have heard me from time to time joking about decorating your houses, or having bathrooms large enough to play shuffleboard in. Friends, all I am trying to do is to

remind you that you have been given a great amount of responsibility. Your wealth has a great privilege given to you by God. To whom much is given, much will be required.

By my little pokes and occasional humor in the pulpit, all I am trying to do is to get you to stop lining your own pockets and to call you to a greater level of giving. To remind you as your pastor that we will be facing a day of accounting. That is the first principle. To whom much is given, much will be required.

The second principle is very much like it. Just use what you have for the glory of God. Friends, I know that we continually make excuses like the wicked servant in this story saying to God, "But I don't have that much." We look at ourselves and we say about our gifts: I can't speak well; I can't share my faith well; I am not a very good singer; my circumstances are like this; I have so many pressures in my life; My child is sick; I am out of work; on and on and on.

God will never hold you responsible for what you don't have. God will hold you responsible for what you do have and for how you use what you have. "But I am not a leader. I am just a one talent person." Your job is simply to fill the box God has put you in, not to be upset that you are not in a bigger box.

Some of you have a few hours of time that you can use for the purpose of the kingdom of God. Use it.

Where should I use it, Rich?

Well, we have a food pantry. Take two or three hours out of a week or every two weeks and go down to the food pantry. If you have kids, take them down to serve this summer, teach your kids to not be selfish. You can pick up a flier on Fruit of the Vine out in the lobby. Go down to the food pantry. Give the leaders a call and say, "I would like to help out. What can I do? I can't do very much, but what can I do?"

You say you are very busy at work. You are a busy physician or busy with your career. You don't have very much time. Use what you have. If you have money, use your money. Give your money. That is your talent. Give it.

We have retired people in the church who have a lot of time. God bless the retired people in the church who have chosen to not take their time and line their pockets with it, but have chosen to give it away. Who have said, "I am not going to fritter away my retirement years puttering around on the golf course or spending all of my time traveling. I am going to use my time for the kingdom of God."

If you have youth, use your youth for God's great glory.

You say, "I don't know how to explain my faith."

Friend, you can invite. If you can't explain, you can invite. There is no one here who couldn't take a card from the church and give it to at least one person a week. Every single one of you could give a Vineyard card to a person once a week. You go to the barbershop, invite your barber to come here. You go to a beauty salon, invite your stylist. You go to the grocery store, invite the check out person. Fill your pockets and fill your purses with cards of invitation.

You could plant flowers around the building, if that is what you can do. You can fold fliers.

Before the message today, there was a little flier handed out regarding the Summer Harvest. Some of you can give \$15.00 a month above your giving for the Summer Harvest. Some of you can give more. Some of you don't have the money. Don't give it, if you don't have it. Give what you have, not what you don't have.

You say, "What happens if I don't give, Rich. What happens if I hold pat and I don't give?"

Well, I believe a verse in the book of Esther, Esther 4:14 applies: God will bring along someone else to give. God will bring along, perhaps, somebody else to evangelize. God will bring along someone else to pray. But we lose the blessing.

If we as a church choose not to multiply, if we as a church choose not to give it away, if we as a church choose not to take our best and send them out in church planting, into world missions, we lose the blessing. Those who multiply, share the joy of the master.

Let's pray.