

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon series: STORY TIME

Take a “Flyer” for Jesus

(Luke 19:11-27)

Study #6

Introduction: Risky business...

Between 1999 and 2007 I had the opportunity to take several trips to Russia to do some teaching at a Bible school.

On one of those trips I took ill for a couple of days. It was a cold November and I spent two days battling flu-like symptoms. I was tired and achy, had a nasty cough, was whiny (a condition which, as those who know me will tell you, is chronic). Anyways, I was sick thousands of miles from home and it was kinda yucky.

There was an older Russian gentleman at the Bible school where I was teaching who heard me hacking away. He walked into the room where I was staying, and told me, in flawless but totally unintelligible Russian, that he knew what I needed.

I knew that this is what he was saying because he had resorted to the time-tested method for communicating in a language your listener doesn't understand of speaking very s-l-o-w-l-y and very **LOUDLY**.

Actually, his hand motions let me know that he intended to heal me, but I was feeling too awful to object, and figured he was harmless.

A few minutes later he re-appeared holding a couple of large pills that he plopped into some water. The water fizzed impressively for a few seconds.

I watched him from my bed, did some quick figuring, and concluded that Russians probably know all there is to know about fighting wintertime ailments. So, feeling too bad to fight both him and my sickness, I took the concoction out of his hand and choked it down.

It was, admittedly, a little risky, but the risk paid off and within twelve hours I was back on my feet, teaching at the Bible school.

You do the same thing, stateside. You go to a doctor you likely don't know outside of the office. He diagnoses your problem and gives you a prescription you can't read. You take it to a pharmacist you've never met who gives you a chemical compound you know nothing about - and you take the medicine! It's a risk you're willing to take.

Taking risks is something we can't avoid. But we usually like to measure those risks before taking them.

- Is it worth the financial risk to invest in a mutual fund for retirement, knowing that there are no performance guarantees?
- Is it worth the health risk to ignore advice about diet and exercise?
- Is it worth the safety risk to travel? What about traveling on Loop 1604 to go out and grab lunch after church? Or, in light of recent flying tragedies, is it worth it to fly away for a vacation? Or, in light of the Ebola epidemic, is it worth the risk to travel to Monrovia, Liberia on a business trip?

It is worth it to take a risk for some things and for some other things, it's not.

In the final installment of our series of studies in Jesus' parables, we're going to listen as He gives us a story that has Him cheerleading for us to be bold Kingdom of God risk-takers.

Setting the Context for THIS Parable

Zaccheus

Our story is found in Luke 19, and it is told right after Jesus had met a man who was both notoriously dishonest and famously short. His name is Zaccheus, and he was a tax-collector.

Zaccheus had climbed a tree so that he could look over the tall people to see Jesus walking by. When Jesus looked up and saw him, He said, **[5] “Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.”**

Zaccheus was so deeply moved that Jesus was willing to meet with him that he instantly had a change of heart and promised to repay anything he had stolen or gotten dishonestly - times four!

Jesus responded to Zaccheus’ sudden generosity with these words: **[9] “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.”**

And then, this: **[10] “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”**

Now, when you are studying a piece of literature, context is crucial. That’s true whether you are looking at a news piece on the Web or at a passage in the Bible. And if we are going to grasp the full import of any of Jesus’ parables, it is vital that we see the context in which it was given.

Part of the context of our parable is that it came immediately after Jesus has reminded us of the heart of His mission, which was to seek and to save the lost.

That’s one part of the context. Another is His decision to address a mistaken mindset the disciples had adopted.

The disciples

[11] While they were listening to these things (the Zaccheus story; Jesus’ restatement of His mission), ***Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.***

If my chronology is correct, Jesus was little more than a week away from His death on the cross when He told this parable. But the disciples had gotten it into their heads that He was about to usher in the Kingdom of God as He made His way toward Jerusalem.

They thought that easy street was just around the corner. A life of safety was in their future with no danger and no threats before them. They would be sitting pretty, friends of King Jesus who would be ruling over a re-constituted Jewish Kingdom.

We know that this was not to be their future. Jesus was going to die and they would carry out His Great Commission in His absence. Their lives would be filled with hardship and challenges.

So, to disciples (like them and us) who needed to know that life would be neither easy nor safe, but filled with danger and risk AND to disciples (like them and us) who needed to remember that Jesus’ mission - and ours! - was **“to seek and to save that which was lost”**, He gave THIS parable.

A Nobleman’s Mission, Commission and Mess (vv. 12-14)

On a Mission (v. 12)

[12] So He said, “A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return.”¹

So, a wealthy man was going away on business. There’s no telling how long he will be gone. But it’s not a permanent departure. The plan is that after taking care of his out-of-town business (he was going to “receive a kingdom”), he will return.

Of course he wanted to ensure that affairs at home were taken care of while he was gone, so he entrusted some of his wealth to some of his slaves.

Gives a Commission (v. 13)

[13] “And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, ‘Do business with this until I come back.’²

¹ There is historical precedent for this scene which would have been well known to most of Jesus’ audience. It concerned a ruler named Archelaus. When Archelaus’ father, Herod, died, Archelaus went to Rome, leaving the territory over which he already exercised rule (the province of Judea), in order to get confirmation of the kingship which had been bestowed on him in his father’s will. Caesar Augustus would be the one to actually name him “king” of all Palestine.

Out of his many slaves, he chose ten to receive money and to put it to work while he was gone.

As becomes clear later, each one of these ten slaves received one mina apiece. Now a mina didn't represent a king's ransom, but it was nothing to sneeze at, either. In terms of actual buying power, let's call it about a thousand dollars.

So, the elements of the parable include a mission for the nobleman and a commission for ten slaves. Here at the outset of the story, Jesus also wants us to know that there are problems in this nobleman's domain.

Enemies! (v. 14)

[14] “But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’”

We don't know why the citizens hated him. We're not told. But Jesus wants us to know that this nobleman had enemies who would prefer that when he left, he would stay gone.³ They don't want anything to do with him.

So this nobleman, who had slaves and enemies, left to take care of business elsewhere. After some period of time, he returned.

And when he returned he immediately turned his attention to the ten slaves to whom he had given a thousand dollars each. He is ready for their reports about what they did with the money while he was gone.

The first slave's report would have made any money manager proud.

The Nobleman Returns and Settles Accounts (vv. 15-27)

Rewards for Risk-Taking Slaves (vv. 16-19)

1000% return on investment! (vv. 16-17)

[16] “The first appeared, saying, ‘Master, your mina has made ten minas more.’”

We can't help but be impressed with his investment results. I wouldn't mind having this man overseeing my retirement. He must have had a system better than my usual “buy high/sell low” strategy.

A one thousand per cent return on investment is great in any economy.

What's just as good is that this slave remembered whose money it was. Clear as a bell, he said, no “*my mina.*” He referred to “*your mina.*” He didn't even claim credit for the increase, “*your mina has earned...*”

The nobleman was pleased with this slave's work and rewarded him, not with money, but with ruling responsibility and with authority.

[17] “And he said to him, ‘Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.’”

This man had been elevated from slave to steward. Now, he moves from steward to ruler.

A second slave came next to give his own glowing report.

500% return on investment! (vv. 18-19)

[18] “The second came, saying, ‘Your mina, master, has made five minas.’”

A five-fold return on principal isn't shabby investing. And as the first slave had been rewarded, so this second slave was also rewarded.

[19] “And he said to him also, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’”

² A “mina” was equal to about 1/50th of a “talent.”

³ In this parable, Jesus means for us to identify Him with the nobleman. And here in verse 14, He is hinting that He knows full well that most of Israel will reject Him from being their King.

As Jesus told this parable, we don't get a report from each of the ten slaves who received a mina. But, we do hear from one more.

After the reports of the other two, my suspicion is that this slave may have been a bit embarrassed by what he had to say. But, he was required to give an accounting, so he stepped right up and gave his report.

Judgment for the Play-It-Safe Slave (vv. 20-26)

"Here is your mina, back" (v. 20)

[20] "Another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief..."

Now, to his **credit**, he didn't lose his master's money. To his **discredit**, he didn't do what the nobleman commanded him to do.

Remember, the nobleman charged his slaves, **"Do business with this money until I return."** This third slave didn't do business with it.

And why did he not invest as the other two slaves had? What prompted him to play it safe? We don't have to guess. He tells us. It was fear.

"I am an exacting man" (v. 21)

[21] 'for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting⁴ man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.'

The other two slaves also knew that the nobleman was an exacting man. Knowing that, they took pro-active risks to get very impressive gains.⁵

⁴ The Greek word translated here, "exacting" is the word from which we get our English word, "austere." It was used in both a favorable and unfavorable sense in Jesus' day.

⁵ This nobleman looks like a pretty ruthless guy. And maybe, for Jesus' purposes in telling this parable, we should think of him that way. After all, remember what his citizens said about him back up in v. 14. Maybe this third slave had something to be afraid of...

This third slave, though, was shackled by a fear of a misstep and so did nothing. If he had hoped that a strategy of safe-keeping was a safe strategy, he was sadly mistaken.

He didn't get a pat on the back for not losing the money. Nor did he get a benign slap on the wrist for his "play it safe" ways. The nobleman dealt with this third slave severely.

"By your own words I will judge you" (vv. 22-26)

Stern rebuke (vv. 22-23)

[22] "He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless⁶ slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? [23] 'Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?'

Catch that. The nobleman wanted the slave to DO SOMETHING with his money. ANYTHING. But don't let it just sit there!

He even suggested putting it in the bank so that it would make interest. Even at today's less than 1% interest rate returns, do that! Even that would be better than putting the money under the mattress.

The master wanted active, engaged, hard-working, risk-taking stewardship of his resources. Not getting that from this slave, he gave orders.

Take-away (vv. 24-26)

[24] "Then he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.'

And the by-standers protest with the same thought that may be forming in your own mind, **[25] "Master, he has ten minas already."**

We think, *"Why give the first slave one more when he already has ten?"*

⁶ The Greek reads, literally, "evil"

If that doesn't seem fair, let's just recognize that the nobleman understood something about life that we need to understand and to embrace. It is a life-governing principle that is as true now as it was two thousand years ago.

[26] “I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.

In other words, the person who makes good use of what he has will be entrusted with more. That is so often the way the world works. Good stewardship and responsibility and faithfulness invite greater opportunity.

And the converse is also true. When we are poor stewards, when we don't work hard, when we aren't willing to take risks to gain an advantage, we may eventually find that what little we do have is gone. That is just what happened to the third slave.

And then, to wrap up the parable, Jesus has the nobleman turning his attention to those citizens who hated him, rejected him, and had opposed his rule. (look back at verse 14)

Condemnation for Enemies Who Reject (v. 27)

[27] “But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence.”

The parable finishes off on a note of frightening severity. Nothing is said about the fate of the fearful, play-it-safe slave, except that he lost the little money with which he had been entrusted. But, the master ordered the opposition slain.

And, thus ends the parable.

This is the sixth parable we have seen in as many weeks. And now that we have heard the story, we need to ask the most important question possible after any Bible study: So what? What difference does this story make to us? We now know the “what”, which is really important. So what?

It is usually a challenge to make a parable “walk on all fours” and identify what in the parable corresponds to what in real life. With this parable, however, it's not all that hard.

Jesus is the nobleman. Just as the nobleman went away, so Jesus has left. The nobleman returned and we believe that Jesus is going to return, too.

I believe that Jesus wants us to picture Him dealing with people who respond to Him in different ways. In the story, we have faithful and unfaithful slaves and then the citizens who hated him.⁷

Let's first consider how the nobleman responded to those who didn't want to have anything to do with him.

Wrapping Up: The NOBLEMAN, JESUS, and YOU

INVITATION: Come to Jesus

Certainly, the parable is a warning to everyone that even though Jesus has gone away, He will return. And, when He returns, He will put down all rebellion. He will right all wrongs. And He will deal with those who have rejected Him.

And here is among the most sobering truths in the whole Bible. One day, all who have rejected Jesus will face the certain wrath of God.

But today, for everyone who is alive now, before His return, Jesus extends an invitation to turn to Him. Trust Him now. Because if you don't, if there is no Savior covering your sin, you face God covered with your sin.

The citizens who hated this “*exacting man*” should have accepted his rule. And if they should have done that, given the hard man that he was, HOW MUCH MORE should you, today, entrust yourself to Jesus, who is gracious and loving and forgiving.?

⁷ In the original setting, these “citizens” referred to the generation of Jews who rejected Jesus. In our own day, we would see them as anyone who rejects Jesus.

He calls you to receive Him and the free gift of eternal life He offers, now. And that is the message for anyone here and for anyone you know who has yet to place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Put your faith in this Jesus and become a son or a daughter of God!

But the nobleman in the parable - who represents Jesus - didn't only deal with people who rejected Him. He also dealt with the responses of His personal slaves / stewards.

As we saw earlier, this parable was given to Jesus' disciples (v. 11) and there is a message here for those who have already trusted in Him.

He is clearly calling us, His people, to be good stewards of the resources He has put at our disposal. More than that, He is urging risk-taking stewardship so as to maximize kingdom of God return on investment.

But what kinds of risks is He talking about and what kinds of returns does He have in mind?

Well, let's remember that the parable was given right after Jesus had redeemed Zaccheus, the tax-collector AND right after He said that He had come *"to seek and to save that which was lost."*

That's the setting of the parable.

CHALLENGE: For the sake of your friends and for Christ's sake - take risks to share the Gospel

So, I'm convinced that the most obvious application of this parable is to say that until Jesus returns, we His people are to be busy taking risks to share the Gospel so that the lost can be found.

God and risk

Looked at in context, I'm not sure that there is any way to miss the idea that God is looking for us to adopt a risk taker's mentality. He delights in the daring of a gambler when it comes to evangelism.

Now, next season, if you and I go out to the AT&T Center to take in a Spurs game, I can follow the action. I get basketball. But if you take me out to Retama, I'm lost.

The whole Pari-mutuel wagering thing is foreign to me. I don't "get" Exactas, Tri-fectas, Superfectas or Daily Doubles.

"And," you say, "*it had better stay that way, Pastor!*" OK. Nobody wants to hear about their pastor losing his shirt betting on the horses.

Now, this is not a sermon on gambling, Pari-mutuel racing, or the pros and cons of the Texas State Lottery. But it is a sermon in which we are exploring the nature of risk.

When we turn to Luke 19 we read what we could easily title, "The Parable of the Good Gamblers". Two of the nobleman's slaves were commended for making investments that got a 1000% and 500% returns. And nobody makes that kind of ROI without taking some risk!

The man who got a return of 1000% probably put his master's mina on some old nag at 100-1 odds to come in 1st in the 5th at Pimlico.

The second slave probably got his broker to buy shares of United-Off-the-Wall to get a 500% return on his investment.

The third slave played it safe, knowing that his master was a hard man. Out of fear, he avoided the roulette table and squirreled the money away under his mattress.

When Jesus gets to the punchline of this story, we might expect Him to say, "*The moral of the story is, play it safe.*" But, instead, we hear, "*Go for broke. God loves it when you take a risk for Him.*"

Jesus teaches here that living faith-fully equals living risk-fully. God is not at all against risk. He just wants us to risk it all on Him.⁸

⁸ Taking a risk doesn't mean "leaving it up to chance." Risk, as I'm using the word, refers to the potential or real loss of something to gain something of greater value.

You and risk

We could apply this thought about God's love of risk to almost anything when it comes to the life of faith:

Prayer (what risky prayers are you praying?);

Giving (how extravagantly are you investing in God's kingdom work?);

Service (in what risky ventures are you involved, for Christ's sake?).

But given the context, I believe that the most appropriate place to take aim and apply this parable is in our relationships with people we know who don't know Jesus.

Take an evangelistic "flyer"!

Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Church in Chicago, writes of the foolishness of "*betting the farm*" and of the need, on occasion, to "*take a flyer*."

- "Betting the farm" means that you risk everything without much of a chance of success. It's a move of desperation.
- "Taking a flyer" involves a bold and smart use of gifts and resources, leveraged to maximize a kingdom gain.

For me, betting the farm, evangelistically, might be going to a shopping mall, standing on a pedestal and preaching a sermon. I'm not really gifted for that sort of thing. That wouldn't be betting the farm for some people who are gifted at open air evangelism. But it would be, I believe, for me.

But evangelistically speaking, I can envision "taking a flyer." It would involve something risky and would mean doing something that costs. As I've thought about my own gifts and resources and personality, several ideas have come to mind:

- I could take regular walks in my neighborhood (prayer walks or otherwise) with a commitment to speak with neighbors I pass;
- I could join a Crossfit box where I would rub shoulders with non-church people;
- I could take advantage of natural opportunity to share Christ with folks who regularly come by the church during the week;
- I could ask for your help. Seriously.

See, the reality is that as a pastor, I spend a lot of time at the church and I spend a lot of time with people in the church. And I'm OK with that.

However, over the weeks of our studies in Jesus' parables, I've become more and more convinced that He wants me to have more contact than I'm normally having with people who are far from God.

You could help me by praying that God would give me open doors to establish friendships outside the church. You could even invite me along for lunch when you're getting together with some of your buddies from church. (I'll try to not embarrass you!)

Something needs to give. I'm ready to take a flyer to become a friend to Jesus' friends who don't know Him yet.

So what about you? Are you willing to consider "taking a flyer" for the Gospel? What would it look like for you to step out of your comfort zone to bring your friend to Jesus and to tell your friend the best news they'll ever hear?

Would you agree to pray about it until God graces you with a bold and smart idea that uses your gifts and resources and personality to maximize a kingdom gain?

Your friend's eternal need demands a now response. She needs to know the Jesus you know. He needs to know that there is a Savior he can trust to find forgiveness. Take a flyer and figure out a way to tell them.

There is even urgency about this.

On the evening of June 13, 2013, Todd and Brenda Havekost were sitting inside their home in Leon Valley, relaxing. They were minding their own business when someone knocked at the front door.

They weren't expecting anyone to come over so, at first, for a bit, they ignored the knocking. But this guy - whoever he was - was persistent. He wouldn't stop knocking at the front door. Finally, annoyed or not, I don't know, they got up and answered the door to find a total stranger.

He had been driving on their street, got to their house and noticed that their house was on fire! That's right.

See, shortly before he drove by, the Havekost's home had been struck by lightning and had started to burn. They didn't even know that their house was on fire. But this stranger had the grace to stop and the determination to keep pounding on the door until somebody answered.

That night their house was terribly burned, but they were saved from the fire by a stranger who stopped.

I've spoken with Todd about that night. I've never heard him say, "Yes, but we were having such a relaxing evening when that guy knocked on the door..."

Given any other scenario, stopping and knocking at a stranger's front door could be considered intrusive and unwelcomed. But not if your house is on fire!

Your friend's house is on fire. She needs, he needs the Savior that you need. And when you bring your friend to Jesus, you'll be giving your friend the greatest gift they could ever receive - and you'll come out way ahead, too.

That's the last element of Jesus' parable I want to mention this morning. You'll remember that the nobleman richly rewarded those slaves who invested wisely and boldly.

PROMISE: God knows how to reward you when you take risks to bring your friends to Jesus

He gave to the one slave rulership over ten cities and to the other ruling authority over five!

We sometimes talk about the Law of the Harvest. Often, when we do, we talk about it in a negative way.

Paul writes in Galatians 6, [7] *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*

Point being that if you sow foolishly you will reap sorrow. If you sow sinfully you will reap judgment. OK. It's easy to give a negative spin to The Law of the Harvest.

And that idea does translate to today's parable.⁹ But the Law of the Harvest applies positively, as well.

- Take advantage of the opportunities God gives you and He will give you more opportunities.
- Use resources and talents and gifts He has given you to glorify Him and He will enhance those resources so that you can glorify Him more.

If your dream is to be one of those people who regularly gets wide open doors to share Christ and takes them - look for one open door and take it. Once God sees that you're serious about sharing Jesus, He'll make sure you never lack opportunity.

Conclusion:

The third slave in Jesus' parable gave the nobleman his money back. Jesus doesn't want His money back. He doesn't want the gifts and resources He has entrusted to us BACK.

He wants them invested in the lives of people He gave His life to save. He wants you to become a Gospel investor through your bold, risky witness.

It'll require the savvy and the daring of a gambler, but don't let that worry you. We're talking about risking everything for God. And after all, at the finish line, He is the only safe bet.

⁹ The unused arm atrophies and the unused machine rusts and the hard-earned ability that lays dormant is forgotten. Just so, the Christian who does not take advantage of opportunities he is given to serve will find himself being presented with fewer and fewer opportunities as time goes on.