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Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:24-30
Sermon: *The Risk Takers*
September 28, 1997

Christians around the world today are praying for persecuted Christians. Most of us are aware that there are about 50 countries in the world where Christians are restricted in their proclamation of their faith. But there are about 15 or 20 countries where Christians are literally persecuted. A few months ago the Christian community became aware that it had been verified in 1996 that around the world 152,000 Christians died for their faith in 1996. Now, if I told you that the Jews were being persecuted or that racial minorities were being persecuted you would become incensed. But I am telling you this morning that the largest religion in the world is having people dying for their faith while we speak. Someone has indicated that more Christians have died for being Christians in this century than in any other century in the history of the world. Recently, in one country it was found that about 5,000 Christians were marched out into the desert and every one of them was crucified because they were Christians. I wanted us this morning to join Christians around the world to pray for other believers. I think we ought to pray for people who have lost loved ones. I think we ought to pray against governments who take power and use politics and religion to destroy their own people. I think we ought to pray for our government, who impacts so many countries around the world on so many things that it makes us wonder why we can't do a better job of impacting these other countries in this area. Someone said recently that we wonder if our government would have been as forceful against South Africa if South Africa had oil. It makes you realize that many times our government only acts when there are economic issues involved, and sometimes we don't act as forcefully as we need to when people are being persecuted. So I think we need to pray for our people. that's not a political statement. We just need to pray for our people that they have

wisdom to know what to do and how to do it, and that they have the gumption to do it.

When Jesus was alive, the leaders of His nation had a story they used to tell. The story went something like this: A man had a business and he had to go on a business trip and he entrusted his business to two of his employees. While he was gone, one of the employees acted very recklessly and in the process lost part of that man's money. When the owner came back and realized what the man had done, he condemned the man; and the commended the man who did absolutely nothing with his part of the money. Now, if I were to ask you if that is a good story, you would say, "Yeah, it has a lot of good truths." The good truth is you don't need to be reckless with people's money. You need to recognized that you need to be careful with somebody else's possessions. But it is interesting that Jesus took that story and changed the ending. What He taught us was that you can go so far in being prudent, be so careful, become so conservative, that you stagnate and end up being no good to anybody. I want to read for you how Jesus changed that old story. The first part of it is a story that Jews knew, but it is the last part that Jesus changed; and I want to talk with you today about how Jesus changed that last part and how he challenges all of us to take risks for Him. There is a new translation of the Bible that I am reading from this morning. It's called *The Message*, and I want to read the story in this translation:

"The kingdom of God is like a man going off on an extended job. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, depending upon their abilities. The he left. Right away, the first servant went to work and doubled his master's investment. The second did the same. But the man with the single talent dug a hole and carefully buried his master's money. After a long absence, the master of these three servants came

back and settled up with them. The one given five thousand dollars showed him how he had doubled his investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on you will be my partner.'

"The servant with the two talents showed him how he also had doubled his master's investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.'

"The servant he gave one talent said, 'Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, and that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent.'"

Now, every Jew would have understood the story I have just read. They had heard it all of their lives. It is the ending that He changed. Listen to what He said:

"The master was furious. 'That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest. Take the talent and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this 'play-it-safe' who won't go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness.'"

When Jesus told this story, He really gave us a drama. It is a drama in three acts. The *first act* is the story of a man who is getting ready to go on a journey and he turns to his servants and says, "Now, you are in charge of my business." What all of us need to recognize this morning is that you and I are partners in the kingdom of God and that while Jesus is not physically present with us this morning, He has turned the affairs of His kingdom over to us.

He is saying to us, "Now, what you are to do is take my work, my kingdom, and you are to expand it." Sometimes people ask me, "What is a truth that I can grab hold to that will help me to develop in my Christian life?" Let me give you the one I think will help to revolutionize your life as much as any other. It is this: that your life is not divided into compartments: what you do at work, what you do with family, what you do for entertainment, and what you do at church. Life is a unit, and what you are is a servant of God. You serve Him at your work, you serve Him in your family, you serve Him in your pleasure, you serve Him through your church. Your job is to view your life as *all that is you is to be a servant of Him*, and *what He has entrusted to you is the very essence of the kingdom* and *your job and mine is to be doing what Jesus Christ was about*. If you were to ask me what this church is to be about, I will give you a mission statement in one sentence. *We are to be about what Jesus was about*. He is the way. He says, *"I give to you, I want you now to take that and I want you to use it for my glory."*

The second thing that He said is, *"I want you to operate on my resources."* These men did not decide they would go out and start a business on their own. He turned to them and he said, *"I'm going to give you everything you need to accomplish my task."* You and I need to understand that God will never point you in a way that He will not provide the resources to accomplish it. When he says *"This is what I want you to do,"* then just look around and you will be aware that you *operate on His resources and not out of yours*.

The third thing that you need to learn is that our task is to expand the kingdom. He said, *"What I want you to do while I am gone is make it bigger."* Now, I have been in church

all my life, and church people always get into big arguments about quality and quantity. What we always do is put our hands together and say, “What God wants us to do is to have wonderful quality in all that we do.” And of course, that is true. He wants us to do the best we can do because it brings glory and honor to Him. But this passage is *not about quality*. This passage of Scripture is about *quantity*. What he is saying is “*I don’t want you just to remain where your are. I want you to take what I have given you and I want you to expand it for the kingdom.*” Sometimes people say to me, “Well, you know, our church is growing and getting larger, and how large ought our church to be?” You’ve been wondering that. I want to give you the answer. It needs to be as large as reaching every person who is under the influence of this congregation. I will not be responsible to God who has given me apart of the kingdom if I come to Him and say, “You gave me one, I give you one back.” Our task is to recognize that He loves the whole world and until everybody comes to know Him, our job is not complete. We must never get to the point where we feel like we’ve kind of done enough; let somebody else do it. *He’s given us a part and our job is to expand it.*

Now, notice the *second act*. The second act is of the man who had one talent. The ones who had a couple of talents are just the showcase. The whole heart of the story is the man who had one talent. What Jesus said about him was that here was a man who refused to take a risk. He was paralyzed by his indecision, so frozen by his fear that he simply did nothing. And Jesus said, “*The people that I condemn are the people who cannot push, step out, go forward, take a risk for me. If I am providing the resources and if you are doing it for my glory, I expect you to reach out and to do more for me.*” Now, all my life, as I have been in church, I have realized that there are two groups of people. One group can tell me all of the reasons why we should not, and one group can tell me all of the reasons why we should. I want to tell you the side Jesus is on. He is on the side of telling us all the reasons why we should. Because He is always saying,

“*I gave you two, I want two more.*” And what He is going to say to us who want to be frozen and not move is, “*I expect you to move forward.*”

Now, it is interesting to me why the man refused to move forward. It was his theology. He said, “God, I am afraid of you. You ask too much. You are a hard God. Just about the time I get comfortable, you come and put all these challenges in front of me. So, God, I’ll tell you why I’m not doing anything. You just give me too much and expect too much. What I want to do is settle in, slow down, take it easy; and I don’t want to do it. God, the reason that I didn’t get it done is your fault.” The second thing that he said was, “I was afraid I would fail.” So you and I need to understand a new definition of failure. Failure in God’s kingdom is *not* to try and not succeed in your goal. Failure in God’s kingdom is *not to have a goal*. The interesting point in this story is not that the one who invested lost money, because if you try to expand the kingdom and glorify God, you cannot fail. there is no failure. So He challenges you to recognize that what He presents for you are challenges. And He will keep on saying to you, “*I want to give you the opportunity to see if you can expand my kingdom.*” Two of the men passed the test and one of the men failed. God is going to do that to you all your life. God is going to always open the doors and say, “*I want to give you the opportunity to be what you want to become. If you want to become a great person of God, seize my opportunity. If you want to shrivel into spiritual smallness, then just don’t do what I tell you to do. Just say it is too much and just draw back in and you will become what you want to be.*” So all of us need to understand that God is always providing us the opportunity to become more; always providing you the opportunity to become the kind of person He wants you to be. How you respond to those challenges will literally determine what you are going to become. If you are given the opportunity to be a teach, and you say, “I’m not

going to do that” without even considering whether you would be on or not--“I’m not going to do that!”--great!; you’ve just withdrawn from spiritual riches. I want to give you the challenge to serve on a committee. “I’m not going to do that.” Okay. You’ll shrivel. If every time He provides you an opportunity and you say no then you are writing your own life story. What He is trying to do is give us opportunities to make us develop and grow.

One of the greatest builders of homes in Texas is a wonderful Christian man by the name of Fred Smith. Fred Smith one day in talking about how God had worked in his life said, “One night God gave me a vision of hell. Hell is seeing everything I could have been if only I had believed in Him.” Here is God throwing open the doors, saying “*I want you to become more than you could ever dream of becoming.*” And the hellishness in our own life is when we refuse to accept the opportunities that are there.

We are in one of our biggest challenges. We are in the challenge of building new buildings. There is a phrase that God has given to me that I want to share with you. The phrase is, “It does *not matter* what we *build*. It *does matter* what we *become*.” We may not be able to do everything we set out to do. But if we don’t do it because we didn’t accept the challenge, the issue for His church is a lot more than buildings. *It is what we will become*. And we will become a people who said, “We refuse to accept the challenge.” Sometimes people’s heads are so in the clouds that their feet are not on the ground. This challenge is not that way. For two years, the best minds in this church--and we’ve got some good ones--have considered this and they say, “This is something we can do; this is something that other churches our size do; this is something that is well within our possibilities; and all that is necessary is that our people catch the vision.” I have said, “*What we do in the next thirty days will in a large part*

determine the character of this church for the next six years.” You cannot look at opportunities and refuse and not pay the price.

On the coast of France, in the Brittany section, there is an abbey. It is called Our Lady of the Risk. In it are nuns who dedicate themselves to the service of God. Why would they call their abbey Our Lady of the Risk? Because they remembered a young girl, probably sixteen years old, maybe seventeen, whom God came to one night and said, “I want to use your body to bring my son into the world.” She said, “Lord, I can’t do that. I’m not married.” He said, “I know that, but I want to use your body. Leave the miracle to me.” She began to think. She lived in a culture where the law said that if you became pregnant outside of marriage, they would stone you to death. If they didn’t stone her in a small village, she would have been totally ostracized. She thought through all of that, and she said, “Whatever you want to do, I give my body to you.” No wonder they call her “Our Lady of the Risk.” You see, *our job is to do what he wants us to do and leave the consequences up to him*. When her son grew up, He began to say “I am going to die.” And then he turned to the people and said, “Let me tell you the risk I am going to take. I am going to risk my life for God and I believe that after I die, He is going to raise me up again.” What a risk! He turns to us and He says, “*This is what I want you to be. I want you to be risk takers. I want you to believe so in me that you will take the step I want you to take, and that God will bless and use you.*”

Let me tell you what I have done. I have already determined what I am going to give to our building campaign. Let me tell you how I went about it. I determined what I could do and I wrote that down. by that I mean what

is the safe, comfortable, stretch a little bit, but I could do it; and then I prayed and I said, “God, what can I do if I take a risk with you?” And I added a very large percentage. If that happens, it is not going to be the easy thing for me to do, but I believe that my job is to be on an adventure with Him and to trust Him for what ought to be done. Our building campaign is only one incident. All of your life God is going to present you challenges and all of your life you will determine the kind of person you will be.

See how the story ends. The master comes back. Somebody said that is talking about the Second Coming. Surely. Somebody said it’s talking about when you die. Surely. But I will tell you another truth that it teaches. *In reality every day is Judgment Day.* If I say no to what God puts before me, I immediately have something taken away from me. If I say yes to the challenges, immediately I begin to receive more. People sometimes come to me and say, “How can I grow in my faith and how can I become closer to God?” So let me tell you the principle. The principle is this: *If you want to grow and you want to do more, be faithful in what God has given you right now. If you are faithful to what He has given you right now, He will give you more. But if you are unfaithful in what He gives you now, He’s not going to trust you with a whole lot more.* So whatever your pleasure, whatever your situation in life, your job is to handle that well for His glory, always expanding. What you are going to find is that God is the God who will always keep opening broader doors and wonderful privileges to you.

I don’t know where God wants you to be. I only know where God does not want you to be. Where God does not want you to be is standing still. I don’t know where He will lead you when you start walking where He wants you to go, but I do know He doesn’t want you parked. He wants you on an adventure with Him, trusting Him, depending upon Him; and if you take the risk, you will enter into the most wonderful adventure of this world. You will find doors of

opportunity and spiritual truths opened. You will come to recognize that you are on the most wonderful adventure of life.