

FAITHFUL → FRUITFUL
Jeremiah 29:11-13; Matthew 25:14-30

(Read Matthew 25:14-30)

Intro: Back in the late 80s or early 90s an “entrepreneur” based just outside of Philadelphia began offering the opportunity to invest in a venture that he promised would benefit the Kingdom of God. Churches that had a lot more money than my little church had and rich businessmen, including some BIC people, and even Messiah College invested with him. They were promised huge returns and for a while some did receive big returns, until the venture collapsed. What the so-called financial whiz was doing was a classic Ponzi Scheme – where the investor gives funds to the fund manager and the fund manager pays former investors with those funds until it runs out and the whole pyramid collapses. It’s a classic “robbing Peter to pay Paul” situation, as all Ponzi schemes are. Investors lost millions upon millions. It was hugely embarrassing and, in many cases, crushing. Some business people were able to weather their loss but others who had handed everything over as they breathlessly saw dollar signs dancing across their vision, lost all they had. Such is the case of get rich quick scenarios – they’re too good to be true, because they’re too good to be true.

Last week I talked about giving with all our mite – that is giving all we have to the kingdom because we can’t out-give God. This week I want to talk about how our faithfulness brings fruitfulness. How this happens is common sense coupled with a knowledge that we must seek God in all we do as we steward our time, talents, gifts, and resources. We will take a look at this using the scripture you’ve heard this morning.

The first comes from the familiar passage from Jeremiah that Martha read earlier in the service. It’s a powerful truth . . .

God has plans for us – and they are good

- God is not out to get us, but too many people think that he is. Very often the God of the universe is likened to a nasty little boy with a dirty face who pulls the wings off of a fly just to watch it buzz helplessly around in circles, or taunts or beats a dog just to hear it yelp. This is not the God who loves us so much he went to the Cross for our abundant life now and eternal life later.
- No! God has *plans for welfare and not for evil, to give [us] a future and a hope*. Jeremiah 29:11. That’s what any good father wants for his children and he is, as the song says, in a tremendous understatement, a good, good father. Furthermore, he has every capability to make it happen for us. God is not powerless to prosper us – he wants to, loves to, and will include us in his wonderful plans.
- But, when life goes off the rails, I often hear people ask, “Why is God doing this to me?” And the answer is, he’s not doing it to you. God does not work that way, though he might be allowing it to happen for some reason only he knows. Remember, the words of Isaiah?

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
 neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.
 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
 so are my ways higher than your ways
 and my thoughts than your thoughts.* Isaiah 55:8-9

But, we cannot deny that sometimes it’s simply because we got ourselves into the mess we’re in.

- You see . . .

The situation, good or bad, that we are in, is very often, of our own doing

- The people of God to whom Jeremiah is writing in Jeremiah 29 were in Babylon rather than their beloved homeland because they had ignored God as he implored them to come back to him. The result was, and as punishment, they were sent into exile in a swampy malarial area 750 miles (by the way the crow flies) away. As you read the first ten verses of Jeremiah 29 you know that the Israelites were pining for their homeland. To make it worse, false prophets, like Ponzie Scheme scammers, were promising what they could not deliver because it was plain and simply, false. God’s message through the true prophet, Jeremiah, was, your exile will last 70 years, which is a way of saying, as far into the future as they could see, and so they better settle in and get used to their surroundings.
- The three servants who received disbursements of talents (One talent was equivalent to 20 years’ wages) invested their funds in different ways. The two who received five and two talents respectively, invested

their talents with wisdom and confidence because they wanted to do well by their master who had trusted them with his funds. In the end they both doubled their investment and were richly rewarded. The third guy was resentful and lazy and didn't actually invest his allotment, instead he just buried his talent in a "safe" place. We know where he ended up – and it was all his own doing – or, not doing, if you want to look at it that way.

- Where we are in life is in direct correlation to our response to God. If we are obedient to God our situation is going to be infinitely better than if we are disobedient to God – it's that simple. I don't say that lightly. I know that there are scenarios that seem to fly in the face of what I just said. But as we look into those scenarios, I'm certain that we could soon see where God's plan or human actions become evident. However, as I already pointed out just a little bit ago, sometimes God's ways are just beyond our comprehension and we just simply have to hold on to the promise that his plans for us are always good. He knows what's good for us.
- In fact, he knows us so well that . . .

God sets us up according his good pleasure and our ability

- The people of God in Babylon in Jeremiah 29 needed to just face the music and disregard the false prophets and bloom where they were planted. Once again, this is in the verses leading up to what Martha read, but take a look at it when you get a chance. They are told to forget beautiful Jerusalem and make the dump they were given by their captors into a beautiful place in its own rights. They were to clean out the broken down canals and drain the marshes and build houses and plant gardens and marry off their kids, and most of all SERVE GOD, right where they were.
- God's people in exile were to do what they were good at and he would do what he's good at, because you cannot out-give God (there that is again!!!) His blessings come when we go forward in faith. His promise is unmistakable, listen, *Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.* Jeremiah 29:12-13.
- In our Matthew 25 passage, the servants were each given their allotment of talents "according to his ability" Matthew 25:15. Their master knew their capabilities and he disbursed his talents accordingly. God gives to and prospers those whom he knows will use his resources, whether it's time, talents, or money, wisely. If we do just a little research we can find examples of this.
 - Luke Keefer Jr. was a preacher's kid farm boy from Pennsylvania who could have stayed on the farm or become a wonderful school teacher or even a missionary. All three are terribly important vocations. We all know how humanity would fare without farmers putting food on our tables or if teachers didn't pour into the lives of students or if missionaries didn't heed the call of the Great Commission. But Luke had a talent: It was an incredible intellect that could take difficult theological concepts and make them crystal clear to simple minds like mine. Whereas other theologians used soaring language that seemed, almost intentionally so, unintelligible, Luke spoke carefully and kindly. He invested his talent well.
 - My friend Jim has the Midas touch. His talent is taking what God provides, and like the servant in our parable who received five talents, makes it double. He takes what God has given him and invests it with confidence and then he gives and gives and gives and gives. He's the most generous person I know.
- God knows us. Now that seems like a no-brainer, but too many of us act like we don't believe it. But it's true! God knows what he wants from us and what we are capable of and then he gives to us accordingly. He has plans for us to hope and prosper.
- So then, as we wrap this up and as we consider what we've heard from our texts, let's ask . . .

Conclusion: What will we do?

- Will we build and bloom where we are planted rather than pine for something we do not have? Why pine when we can bloom? Flowers are much more lovely than pines anytime.
- Will we invest in what we have been given by the hand of God or will we bury it because we want it to be "safe"? After all, what is "safe" anyway?

- I think it was Max Lucado, who told a story that I read years ago about how, when he was child in West Texas, a tornado was bearing down on his home. He told how there was not tornado shelter or basement under the home, so his father had his wife and Max and his 3 older siblings lay on the floor in the center of the home and he piled mattresses on them. But instead of joining them there, Max's father went and stood at the window and watched the approaching storm. Lucado recalled that he could see his father's feet as he peered out from under the pile of mattresses and people and how he crawled from under the pile and clung to his dad's feet because his security was with his father. Was it safe? What is safe anyway?
- Safe is where God sends us and what he asks us to do.
- And finally . . .

Choose joy

- There is joy in investing in the kingdom. Our text says that the master blessed the obedient servants with, *'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.* Matthew 25:23. The *wicked and slothful servant* (vs. 26), who couldn't be bothered with what his master had entrusted him with was excoriated and then damned to the outer darkness. It seems that joy is definitely worth any risk.
- If God is promising us a future (that is good) and hope – why in the world would we not pursue that with all we have? I'm just asking. I mean, really, faithfulness that results in fruitfulness is a win-win. Amen.