

**Series: POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE - March 8, 2009**

**BURIED ALIVE!  
Matthew 25:14-30**

**I. INTRO**

- A. I gave a guy a surprise the other day. Actually, shock would be more the word. We needed some work done on our van, so I rented this dark blue Chevy Cobalt for a few days. I was visiting at the funeral home—and a guy offered to park my car for me. When I came out after the visitation I looked around and the blue Cobalt was **nowhere** to be found!

-So I asked the guy where it was. He looked around frantically and said, “I didn’t park a blue Cobalt today!” I said, “Yes you did. I pulled in here at 1:45—and you offered to park it!” After several minutes of deep panic, wondering what in the **world** could’ve happened, I noticed I was standing in front of a silver Honda. **My** silver Honda! And I thought, “Oh yeah—I drove **this** because of the 407! So I opened the door and said, “This one will do!” And drove off. Actually, I did admit my mistake to the poor guy. Did I ever feel like an idiot!

1. Sometimes the surprises come more in the form of visits. Someone shows up that you hadn’t expected; not yet, anyway. Your boyfriend comes home from university a day early to surprise you—and catches you bleaching your mustache. Your parents come home early from vacation and catch you in the middle of the party you were told not to have. Your husband’s evil mother shows up—with her white gloves! Those are not nice surprises! We’d like to be prepared!

-I actually have this nightmare that frequently haunts me. I’m supposed to give a talk, and I’m in my underwear and can’t find my pants, or I haven’t studied, or I can’t find my notes. The worst part is that people—you—are getting restless and **beginning to leave!**

- B. In this series, we’ve been studying the stories that Jesus told, called parables. They weren’t dreamy little stories about ponies and babies—you know, about being a nicer person and flossing your teeth. They were powerful—and they’ve had a profound effect on our world.

-Jesus kept telling these stories, pretty much right up until he got arrested—and then executed. He knew his death was imminent. And the last stories he told were intended to prepare his people for the gap between his first coming—and when he would return.

**II. THE RETURN**

- A. In the last chapters of the book of Matthew, Jesus has just days to live—and He’s talking about the **what next?** part of history. Specifically, His return—and what will happen **before** that takes place.

1. It's not a pretty picture. It involves the coming of false messiahs and false prophets; it involves natural disasters—and it involves really tough times for His followers.

-But He does say this—that the Mission **will** succeed, and the Good News of the Kingdom they've been entrusted with **will** get carried to every nation on the planet. He connects these last days with Daniel's prophecies—and the horrible things that will go on in Jerusalem.

-And he says, "You're going to hear a **lot** of stuff from false prophets about me showing up here or there—but my coming will be **unmistakable!** And in that moment, the angels will gather my followers from everywhere. Don't get fooled—and **stay alert!** And Jesus is clear that **no one** will figure out when his coming will take place—we just need to live wisely—and keep our eyes open.

2. And **that's** when he tells three parables—one on top of the other—about what **staying alert** and **being prepared** looks like.

-Sandwiched in the middle is the story we're going to talk about today. Again—the context is Jesus coming back to earth to make all things new—and the call to His followers to be **ready!**

**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. (Matthew 25:14-18 NIV)**

3. One of the key points in this story is coming to a clear understanding of **who** owns—and **who** manages.

For example--what is the difference between a **nanny** and a **parent**? Nanny's do a lot of the same things parents do, right? A nanny cares for and manages the children—and children generally love the nanny. But if the kids stuff peanuts up the dog's nose, who pays the vet bill? The parents or the nanny? If the kids go to jail, who bails them out—the parents or the nanny. Nannies manage the children—but they **belong** to the parents. And all the nanny's said? Amen!

-In this story—who owns? The **Master**. Who manages? The servants. And the owner entrusts the three servants with what would appear to be the bulk of his assets.

-Who do you think the master who leaves on a trip represents in this story? It's Jesus, of course. We would be the...? Servants--**entrusted with HIS property**.

-What's interesting about this whole scene is that there's no one actually managing the managers. No hidden cameras. No regular reports to be

emailed. No one sitting in a car across the street taking pictures. The simple understanding from this owner is, ***I'll be back!*** So all three servants clearly understand that they are accountable for what the owner has entrusted to them.

4. Just another note on this. When this story talks about ***talents***, it's not talking about the natural abilities you and have been given. A ***talent*** was a unit of measure—about 75 lbs. or 34 kg. of gold. In today's market—that would represent about \$1.4 million. In that culture, a talent would be worth about 6000 day's wages—20 years of work.
  - Jesus point was that these servants—slaves, really, were entrusted with a ***huge*** amount of money. Even the guy who only got one talent. The fact that he gave each servant a different amount—based on ability—shows both that this owner really ***knew*** them—and ***trusted*** them. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for these guys!
  - Two of the servants in Jesus' story went *at once* and put the money to work. They ***got*** it. The owner had entrusted his estate them for a reason; he wants them to DO something with it! The contrast, of course, is that one of these guys digs a hole and buries what he is supposed to invest.
5. Anyone here ever invested in RRSPs for your retirement? So, imagine that you decide to retire and do start a bungee-jumping business. So, you check on your RRSPs—and your investment counselor says, "You know—when you started the markets were a little unstable—and after that, well, we just kinda forgot. But don't worry—we have kept ***all*** the money you've sent us in the company safe. We'll write you a check for it! Would you be happy? Maybe not! Although in ***today's*** market—hmmm!

- B. And that lands us on the second part of this parable. As he said he would, the owner comes back. Now, ***this shouldn't have been a surprise***. He didn't hand them the money and say, "Hey, go have fun, take a cruise, buy fast cars!" He ENTRUSTED them with it—which means that ***sometime***, ***somewhere*** there's going to be an accountability meeting. Let's read the rest of the story:

**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. '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!'**

**Then 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.'**  
**(Matthew 25:19-30 NIV)**

1. The story is pretty self-explanatory, isn't it? The bulk of this story is really about the accountability meetings—two of which were splendid; one of which—well, not so splendid.

The two managers who put the money to work got a 100% return on the money—and they were quite excited. The owner's trust in them was totally validated.

-Interesting, isn't it, that the master calls their wise investment of an immense amount of money, **being faithful with a FEW things**. 375 pounds of gold? 100 years of cumulative wages—a **few things**? But in Jesus' story, this is just the crash dummy test for being in charge of **many** things—whatever that meant. And they are heartily welcomed into the joy and abundance of the owner's life. They were **good** servants! And they were **faithful** servants!

2. But the joy in this story doesn't last long. The focal point is the guy who buries the 75 pounds of gold in the back yard. And things do not go well for him. Not at all. He **knows** the owner isn't going to be happy about him burying his investment—and he **immediately** attacks the Master's character. Doesn't that blow your mind? The owner **trusted** him! "I think **so much** of you—I'm going to place 20 **years** of wages in your care to invest for me as you think is best." -And yet this guy snarls, "Yeah, well I know you—and you're a tough nut! You're always scrounging around, looking to get something you don't deserve—and harvest crops where you haven't planted a **thing!** And **that's** why I hid your money in the ground, cause, see, I was afraid! I thought, 'If I goof up and lose money—he's gonna have my hide!' So, here's your money back! Don't worry, it's all there!"
3. All the owner does is **trust** him with a bunch of money—and this guy accuses **him** of being the problem! What a horrible excuse for laziness! For taking an incredible once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—and **burying it alive!** -Well, this owner comes back at this worker with a velocity that I'm guessing **no one** listening to this story would've expected. The first thing he does is expose the guy's logic for what it is: A load of **scubala**. He says, "Okay—so let me see—I'm a tough guy to work for. You know I'll have some expectations on the 75 lbs of gold I left in your hands—so, knowing I'm going to expect a return—you **play it 'safe' by burying it in your backyard**—when you **could've** gotten at **least** 4% per year in interest from the bankers? That doesn't even make sense! Truth is—you're **wicked**—because you are **willfully** manipulating the

truth to escape what **you** thought you'd get away with. You're trying to blame me for your own laziness! You knew that this money was entrusted to you—but you didn't care enough to do a single thing about it!"

-The owner has this man removed from his presence, the one talent he's just dug up taken from him—and then has this guy shoved out into the darkness of **gnashing of teeth**. You gnash your teeth when you are filled with regret; when you miss the opportunity of a lifetime, and there are no second chances.

4. I don't know about you—but knowing that Jesus is God; knowing that He told the absolute truth about life, about death, about what's next...about **everything**—the ending to this story is a tough one for me. There are times when I read this and think, "Wow! That's hard! I mean, after all, the guy didn't embezzle it, take a Mediterranean cruise, buy Cuban cigars and fine Scotch." -But he **did** know what the Master expected, he had plenty of time to do it—and he REFUSED. Did his own thing. And his words reveal the contempt he had carried in his heart all along.

-How many of you remember what final exams were like in high school or university? It wasn't my favorite time, that's for sure.

-Ever gone into an exam, read through the questions—and had this horrible realization that you'd studied the wrong stuff?. It hits you right about here—in the gut--this sick feeling! Jesus is telling you and me beforehand, "You know—this investment stuff I'm talking about? It's on the final exam. And the final exam is not **knowing** the right answers, like there's going to be a questionnaire in Heaven or something. It's **living** the answer!"

Jesus has gone on a long journey—He's ascended to the Father. He's entrusted everything to us—His servants. He's coming back. And there will be a final assessment.

### III. THE FINAL ASSESSMENT

- A. When I was young, the thought of Jesus coming back again was not a comforting thought. I knew it was **supposed** to be—but it seemed more threatening than anything.

-We'd have speakers come to our church to teach about the end times with all their charts and stuff—and it just scared me. I used to think, "I hope Jesus doesn't come before I get married—I at **least** want to experience sex before it gets eliminated altogether. And the thought of Jesus just **showing up** when I was in the middle of doing something embarrassing—or evil was scary. I remember one day coming home—to an empty house. I went through the house calling out, "Mom? Dad? **Mom!? Dad!?**" I was scared to death. I thought Jesus had come and I'd been left behind!

1. I've realized since that when the Bible talks about Jesus' coming—it's not intended as a scare tactic. You know, like the boss showing up when you're goofing off. It's intended to comfort us. The thought is, "You know the mess our world is in—and the pain and unfairness that takes place every day? It **will**

end! God is going to bring everything together—and re-establish **shalom** in every place where there's chaos and fear and war. Kid's starving? A thing of the past. Hospitals? EMT? AIDs clinics? Gone! The Creator of all is coming back to His Creation—and it will all be breathtakingly beautiful and pristine again! Heaven will come...here. The prayer you've prayed, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven"—will be reality!

2. See, I kinda thought—at least from what I heard--that Jesus was coming back to surprise and spank naughty Christians—and basically punish everyone else for ticking Him off. Over time, I've come to see why Jesus' followers down through the years have called it the **Blessed Hope**. I've come to realize that this amazing Person the world has **never** forgotten, the One failures felt safe with—the One I so love and respect and worship—will be here once again. I've always longed to spend a day with Him—and I can. And I won't necessarily have to ride a white horse next to his.

-Don't mistake what I'm saying. He will **judge** the earth. That's clear. But it's not only judgment that will be complete; **grace** will be complete; **love** will be complete; **peace** will be complete; **compassion, joy, kindness, ecstasy**—all the things we see so incompletely now—will be **complete**. And **I** will be complete—as the person I've always longed to be. So will you.

- B. That's what's to come. But **don't** miss the point of this story. Here's the deal: He's called those who love and respect and follow Him—to **engage!** See, for some reason, I think we've missed the incredible investment He's handed to us. See, we tend to think, sometimes, that our job is to keep our nose clean—floss our teeth, wash our hair, read our Bibles, say our prayers—you know, so that when He comes, He won't have to power-wash us. Cause, after all, he's going to be **very** busy power-washing the world!

-But the image here is very clear. He **has** gone on a long trip. He's still here through the power of the Holy Spirit; He's present whenever two or three people gather. That's absolutely true. But He's ascended to the Father—and He's entrusted his **entire mission**—His **Kingdom**—to...**us**. Yep! **We're** the servants in this story. Jesus has invested in **us!**

-And it's not like He's slid a few rolls of loonies our way. This is **huge!** Just like these servants were entrusted with way more money than they had ever even seen in their lives—what God has **entrusted** to us involves way more than we would ever think. And the truth is--all we have—**all we have**--comes from Him. His advice to us? **Invest!**

-And I want to get very personal: He has invested in **you**—and **you...**and in **you**. Everyone here. It's all His—but He's placed all I have in **my** hand—and all you have in **your** hands. And our challenge is learning to see exactly what He's given us, and knowing Him well enough to know **where** to invest. And I want to ask you, **what do you have in your hand?**

1. Well, money would be one thing God has entrusted to us, wouldn't it? Affluence, really. Now, I know that many people in this area are having a tough time. But when I say **affluence** I'm not talking about a 27,000 sq. ft. monster home; I'm talking about an adequate roof over your head. I'm not talking about garages full of Silver Shadows, Lamborghini's and Viper's. I'm talking about actually **owning** a car that works. I'm talking about not having to worry about where the next meals coming from. I'm talking about having **any** money in the bank. I'm talking about being able to send your kids to a private school.

-This isn't to make **anyone** feel guilty—cause I fit this too. But I think we have to just tell ourselves the truth on this—we are an affluent people, even if we are in debt. And I don't know anyone here who would choose the alternative—which is poverty and need. But in a world of need—if we belong to God—and we see ourselves as **His** children, **His** servants—and see what we have as **Him** entrusting it to us—then we are called to invest in what is close to His heart, right?

2. We've also been given talents. Interesting, isn't it, that Jesus' story transformed the word **talent** from a measuring term for gold and silver—to the God-given abilities humans are given to serve others.

-You have talent. You are **skilled** at doing something. It may be the ability to build friendships, or speak, or do business, or build things. You may have musical ability or artistic ability. You may have the talent it takes to organize things—or make sure things happen. You may be talented at making people feel loved, or making food.

-And with all this also comes **spiritual** gifts. A spiritual gift is the supernatural ability God gives you to serve Him in restoring all people—and all of Creation to Himself. It can involve speaking, teaching, encouraging, healing, helping, leading, administrating, speaking foreign languages—the list is almost endless. But **you** have to figure out what it is—and use it!

-And then there are **opportunities**. Sometimes those opportunities to serve and help others come from something God's people organize—either on weekends or during the week—that serve God's purposes in the world. In my humble opinion, most opportunities to make a difference happen outside gatherings like this—in your day-to-day world—where you are most likely the **only** servant God has on duty there. And the opportunities come as you make yourself available to love, help, serve and engage as **Jesus** stepping into that situation through one of his Followers. It's not organized by the **church**—it's arranged by the Holy Spirit.

3. Here's my point. **Life** is the currency you and I deal with. Invest with. Jesus is not visibly supervising us, sending us memos, telling us to shape up or we'll get fired. We don't get a paycheck in the mail; we don't get a company uniform to wear. There's no logo. Every day, we are given about 24 hours of **currency** to work with and engage with. And we all have varying amounts of talent, spiritual gifts, money, energy—and opportunities. But we're **all** called to invest.

-And Jesus says to us through this story, “Why would you **not** want to invest? It’s way more important than you’d every dream. And there is this thing about life called **accountability**—the last interview where we are asked, “Where have you **invested** all I’ve placed in your hands?”

- C. I’ll tell you what I think is our biggest disadvantage in grasping this story. It’s our tendency to think of ourselves as employees—not servants, or slaves. When Jesus told this story—**everyone** knew that the servants actually **belonged** to the Master. They either **were** servants, **had** servants, or **knew** servants.  
-Servants, see, didn’t just leave a job they didn’t want to do—and go get another one. And in this story, the **trust** of the Master—and the **arrogance** of the servant would’ve blown everyone away. Servants didn’t just blow off what a Master asked them to do.

1. The hard part for us in hearing what Jesus is saying here is the way our world system exalts independence. “Don’t let **anyone** tell **you** what to do!” Really, almost everything in 21<sup>st</sup> century North America fights against what Jesus is urging us to do in his story.

\*We are told, every day, to think about ourselves, worry about **our** future, **our** money, **our** home, **our** image. That we need more, that we need this experience, that we deserve to be heard, to experience romance, to have exciting experiences, and to check off everything on OUR **bucket** list. Every day of our lives, we are encouraged to live **beyond** our means, to fill up our days with our own agenda—or our kids agenda. The implication is that God is kinda this genie in the sky—this **Force** who is there to give to **us**, love **us**, help **us**, serve **us**, make **our** lives easier.

\*In fact, the main idea is that life is about **us**. And that if we do things for others—it is for **our** self-fulfillment and gratification. That helping others is about **self**-actualization.

2. But Jesus taught something **way** different. He said that the life we have been given—and all that He has invested in us—is about being His servant. About serving others on **His** behalf. Notice how the Master in this story commends the guys who have **invested** well what they’ve been **entrusted** with. “Well done, **good and faithful SERVANT.**”

-And that’s the big—**really** big question, isn’t it? How do **you** see yourself? As belonging to **you**? Or belonging to God. Here on this planet because He created you; having what you have because **He** gave it to you; here to serve Him completely with all you are, and all you have. **Obedient** to Him. **Accountable** to Him.

-In our world, that sounds like a foreign language, doesn’t it? We tend to see ourselves more as independent contractors. Hired out occasionally by who we work for; sometimes hired out by love for our friends or kids as taxi-drivers, service-providers, or counselors. But basically accountable to no one for how we live, spend, or relax.

3 So, let's just be clear about our calling. Our calling as people made in the image of God, made to do good, made to live with dignity and purpose and meaning is—first of all—to submit ourselves to the Lord of all. Friends, that's not necessarily an act of utter humility and subservience. Know what it is? It's a **REALITY CHECK!** We are created in the image of God to serve God—who is Most High God over **everything** that exists. We **are** servants; we're just either obedient—or **AWOL**.

-Everything we have, all we are, everything that exists belongs to God, and will return to God. See, people can say He doesn't exist. People can call Him something else. People can even claim that **they** are God—if they want to. But it doesn't change reality.

-The question for me and for you is...will we bow our knee to Him—and invest our lives fully in what **He's** up to? That's what we were ultimately made for; and until we click into that, we are quite literally **spinning our tires**.

-Paul, early church leader, presents this amazing spectrum of all that God has done through history—and all Christ has done through his sacrifice to redeem people and restore the world to God—and then He says these words:

**So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.**

**Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it.**

**Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (Romans 12:1-2 Msg)**

-Let's bring all this down out of the realm of theory, okay. Have **you** ever done that? Have you ever just offered yourself completely to God? All you are—to be fully owned by Him?

See, I believe that this is the kind of servanthood, the kind of **investment** it will take for us to multiply all God has given us and make the difference we were created to make.

4. And this whole thing gets back to **trust**. God is willing to trust us—but our struggle in offering ourselves to God is that we're not sure we can trust **Him!** And **that** was the basic complaint of the wicked, lazy servant in Jesus' story, wasn't it? He had developed this sneering, ugly attitude about his Master—as hard, unfeeling, dishonest—out to get something from people he didn't **deserve** to have. Snarling like a wounded dog, he **refuses** to trust the one who trusted him. And he lost everything.

-You **want** to make a difference with your life. You **want** to see a trail of changed lives behind you. When you die—you **want** to have people gathered in a room, talking about what it meant to them to have you as their friend, as their Mom, as their sister, as their boss, as their neighbor. I **know** you want

that! The path—the **only** path--to what you want—is **servanthood**. And the only path to a good final review by the One who created you--is being **His** servant.

5. So, I need to ask you; what have you done with what your Creator has entrusted you with? Is it buried behind the swingset—or over by the fence behind the BBQ? It's living and breathing; it's the most important thing you have to offer this world. God has given it to you—because He wants you to experience the thrill of making a difference! And **some** day—you will be so, **so, SO** glad you did!

#### IV. CLOSING

- A. I never used to think about getting old—you know, someday in 40 or 50 years. But I do occasionally think about it now. I heard some **great** stuff on aging recently.
  - This 104 year old woman was asked by reporters, “And what do you think is the best thing about being 104?” She said, “No peer pressure!”
  - One person’s perspective on how to prevent sagging was, “Just eat till the wrinkles fill out!” Someone else said, “The nice thing about being senile is that you can hide your own Easter eggs!”
 My reality check on life happened last Thursday when my brother, 2 years older than me, had a heart attack. He's fine—but it's this wake-up call that life passes by **much** more quickly than you think it will. And our opportunities to invest—to make a difference? Man do they go by quickly. Jesus' advice? This is **your chance!** You've got one shot at this. Be **wise!**