

The Gospel this morning is a difficult passage, for Jesus spoke to his disciples, those whom he loved, with words of judgment. We're going to talk about what this parable means for you and me in our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

MATTHEW 25:14-30

For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.'²¹ His master said to him, '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.'²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.'

²³ His master said to him, '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.'

²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.'²⁶ But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?'²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an

abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰**And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'**

To get at the key idea in this passage we look for key words. “**Servant**” is repeated six times, and “**master**” is repeated ten times. Indeed, the parable revolves around the relationship between a master and his servants.

The parable is about the Kingdom of God, so the master is God and the servants are people, believers and unbelievers. Jesus gave this message to his disciples, the future leaders of his church, to teach to others after his resurrection.

Two observations about the characters in the parable. First, a master would know his servants intimately. He would know their strengths and their weaknesses, indeed, he would know them as the Lord knows you and me.

And second, servants cannot NOT be responsible to their masters. They serve the interests of their master, that’s why they’re called servants!

Jesus said, **MATTHEW 25:14-15**, “**For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.** ¹⁵**To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability.”**

Key word is “**ability.**” God does make demands of us. But he does not call us to do anything we cannot do. That’s what he means when he says, he gave to each one “**according to his ability.**”

Jesus said, **MATTHEW 25:19**, “**Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.**”

Key word is “**long time.**” Regardless how long one’s master is gone, a servant is responsible for fulfilling the task he’s been given by him. So too Christ will return, but this time not as a baby born in a humble stable. But he will come again in glory with judgment, reckoning to each person according to what he has done.

Jesus said, **Matthew 25:24-25**, “**He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did**

not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.”

The key idea here is how the servant judged his master, saying, **“I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed.”** Really?

The servant condemned himself with his own words. His confession reveals outright rebellion against his master!

Jesus said, **Matthew 25:26-28, “But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.’”**

The key idea here is the wickedness of the servant. He returned what he had been given, but the amount was less than it was when he received it. That’s why the master said he should’ve invested it with the bankers and earned interest. He’s worse off after entrusting the servant with his 1-talent than he was before! What did the servant do but sabotage his master through his passive-aggressive behavior!

The servant is **“wicked.”** He knew what the master required of him, but he refused to do it. This man is not a believer, for he despises God. Thus this parable is not a warning to Christians that they will be judged according to good works. But it’s an indictment against humanity which tramples on the poor and denies the lordship of Jesus Christ.

But here’s Jesus’ message to those who love him: He said, **Matthew 25:29a, “For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance”**: God praises and rewards his children who are productive with MORE work! Work is a gift! Consider Adam, the first man. Before the Fall we find him tending the Garden. Work from day one was a blessing NOT a curse! It’s a blessing, for work is our opportunity to participate in God’s mission to bring his Good News to the world.

God has not called us to do anything we cannot do. For he has given us “TALENTS” – resources, means, wealth – according to our abilities. God knows you very well. And he loves you, for he gave you his son, Jesus, on the Cross for the forgiveness of sins and a new life.

It is an honor that God has given us what we have, entrusting us with his resources, believing that we can get anything done!

Brothers and sisters, it’s never too late to serve God. Everyone’s received **“talents.”**

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God and the second commandment IS LIKE THE FIRST: to love your neighbor as yourself. Thus Luther wrote that we serve God by serving people.

This parable is showing us how our faith is intimately connected with good works. But the ultimate test of our faith is our relationship to Jesus. The 1-talent servant despised his master. That’s why he hid his talent. It all began in his heart. He was **“wicked.”** He used the power he had been entrusted to hurt his master.

Here’s our challenge: First, to identify our talents. What has God given us to work with? You can do a spiritual gifts survey and have some fun with this, or you can simply identify all the stuff you’ve got which you can lend and give away, the skill-set you have which you can use to assist others and church. Whether money, skills, connections, land, material things, or time, we’ve all been entrusted with stuff by the Lord to use on his behalf.

Second, we can evaluate each talent by asking ourselves the question, “How can I use this thing to love my neighbor?”

I know a man who’s a natural caretaker of souls—the sweetest guy you could ever meet. So he spends his free time volunteering to help people at a cerebral palsy center in L.A. I know a woman who has the biggest heart in the world for the homeless, and she loves to work and pound nails. And so she’s a regular volunteer with Habitat for Humanity. I know a man who has the Midas touch. He can’t help but make money. But he gives most of his income to Christian missions to

unreached people around the world. I know a woman who sews like a demon, and so she spends her free time making clothes for impoverished children. Myself, my first gift is administration. I love to organize things. So I've helped to build a half dozen non-profit organizations which serve Christ's kingdom and fulfill his Great Commission.

And the third point is after we've identified our "talents," whatever those might be, let's ask ourselves, "How and when will I use them?"

The moral of this story is that God expects us to leave this world at least as good as we found it. That's all he wanted from the lazy 1-talent servant when he told him he should've at least earned interest. However, we might go the extra mile, with the help of God, and actually double God's investment in us, making this world BETTER than it was when we first arrived.

This week, may we take account of our "**talents**," all the stuff the Lord has entrusted to us according to our "**ability**."

This week, may we be encouraged to use these "**talents**" in some new and wonderful ways to push the ball forward to fulfill the Great Commission.

And this week may we have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.