

**Sermon Notes - November 15, 2020***"It's Up to You"*

Matthew 25:14-30

I want us to think about this passage of scripture for a few moments. There is a placard or a slogan that I used to read and it said, "Life is God's gift to you. What you do with that life is your gift to God." I want you to think about that as we go through this passage today.

Jesus told this story to his disciples. He told them that one day he would come back; he might be delayed in coming. (Last week's sermon was about a bridegroom coming and the bridegroom was late. Christ is the bridegroom.) Today in the story, he's telling it as though he's the Master who's coming back and he's put his servants or slaves in charge of his estate. That was not unusual in the day and time which they lived. For a person to give "a talent" was a lot of money. It might be several thousand dollars. If somebody had five talents (which would probably be equivalent to 15-years of worth), they had A LOT of money. (Now "a talent" in Greek meant "a sum of money" and "a talent" in English means "ability" or "skills" - so you can take it either way. I want us to think about it as abilities or skills.) I want you to think about your talents and abilities as we talk about this scripture today - and I want you also to think about the one man who hid his talent in the ground.

The scriptures said that "God gave them according to their ability" -- to one, he gave one gift; two to another; five to another. You and I know all kinds of people that have four or five gifts - they are able to draw and paint and sing; they have good looks and they are good in sports. We know some people that just have all kinds of talents, but I would say most of us fall into the category of one or two particular gifts or abilities. God has invested in my life and yours, and he's given us something that he wants us to use to make a difference in the world and a difference to bring heaven on earth. As we go through this story, I want you to think about what talent you have.

Why did the man who had one talent get condemned? He wasn't condemned for what he did - it was for what he didn't do. He took the master's money and he went out and just hid it in the ground. He didn't invest it; he didn't try to make a difference in it; he just hid it. He held onto it. Why do you think he did that? In the story it says he was afraid - he was afraid of the master and he hid it in the ground. Maybe he had a misunderstanding of who God was and what God's character is like. If you think about how the master gave one servant five talents (that was a large sum of money), and even the one with one talent had a big sum of money. The Master was very generous and caring, wasn't he? He didn't have to do that, but he did. So I see him as caring and generous and loving. But the one talent man said, "Master, you're a hard man." I want to ask you - aren't there some people in life today that misunderstand who God is?

I heard a story about a lady that listened to her Pastor talking in the sermon about God is "a God of love." He's merciful and kind and compassionate. She went to see the pastor after the service was over and she said, "Pastor, that's not the kind of God that my mother told me about as a kid. She said he was judgmental, wrathful, and he was tough and cruel. With the God that my mother told me about, I felt more condemned than forgiven, more judged than forgiven."

C.S. Lewis who wrote "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," was a scholar, a professor at Oxford University, a book author, and a strong Christian. One time he said, "I had a hard time dealing with God and his unconditional love because I had a cruel father - an absentee father. He was an alcoholic and he spent all his life away from home. When he did come home, he scolded and beat us. I had a cruel headmaster who was insane. I had a hard time when people told me that God was loving, caring, and merciful, because I didn't experience that at home with my father figure."

George Bernard Shaw was a well-known 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and playwright. He said, "My father was a pure scoundrel. He spent more of his time betting on cricket games in London and spending time at the

pubs than he did at home with us kids. He was an absentee father and very cruel. I had a hard time grasping that God was merciful and loving – and to personally experience him that way.”

Maybe the one talent man in our story thought that was the way God was... we don't really know. But he did say, “I was afraid and I hid the Master's money.” Aren't there a lot of people who do that today? They are afraid to use their talent; they are afraid of success; they are afraid they will fail – and they don't risk anything. But life is a risk -- to be in love is a risk – to be in an occupation and a career is a risk – to apply for a job is a risk. God calls us to risk what he's given us and invest it because he's already invested in us!

I want to tell you about somebody who was afraid and she almost let her talent not be used because of her fear. Patsy Claremont is a dynamic speaker for Women of Faith and she's traveled across the country. In fact some of the women of this church heard her in Charlotte several years ago when we took a group of women to hear her speak. She has quick wit; she can teach the Bible in such a way that “an everyday person” can understand. But, Patsy Claremont was not always that way. She had what they call “agoraphobia.” She was afraid of being in crowds. She wouldn't even leave her home. When she got married and had kids, her husband had to take the kids to school. She wouldn't even go to the grocery store. She didn't want to be in a crowd or any place where she just couldn't escape. She wouldn't leave home. For ten or fifteen years after she got married, she had this fear. She prayed and asked God to help her overcome that fear. And I want you to know that she would pray about it and then take it back. (Do you ever do that – pray about something, for God to help you and then you take it back as soon as you walk out the door and quit praying?) Well, she did that for several years. Finally it got to the point that she didn't want her kids to grow up without her doing things with them. She said, “God, please. I'm desperate. Please help me to overcome this. Help me to use the abilities you've given me and to be there for my children and my husband when they want to go out and do things.” God did help her – and I want you to know that she went on to be able to drive herself to the airport, to board

a plane by herself, and to speak in front of thousands of people. She said, "I almost gave up my talent. What God had given me to do was to speak and teach the scriptures with humor. I almost gave it up because of fear of leaving my home - but God helped me to overcome it."

Maybe the "one talent" man was fearful. Maybe, we don't use the talents that God has given us because we're afraid of succeeding; maybe we're afraid of failure; maybe we're afraid to risk.

Maybe there's another reason that he didn't use his talent. Have you ever known anybody that played the "if-only game?" "If only I had her looks" - "If only I had his intellect" - "If only I had his building ability" - "If only I had her drawing skills." Maybe he thought, "If I had what the two-talent man had or the five-talent man had, I would invest what I have and it would make a difference." "If-only" -- some people live that way. They concentrate on what they don't have rather than what they have.

I want to share another true story with you about someone who played the "if-only" game. She was a 38-year-old woman who cleaned houses and hotel rooms. At 38-years-old, she used to watch TV and see actors and actresses on TV. She would tell her friends, "If only I had her looks... If only I had his intellect... if I had her ability, I could be somebody great! I could sing and I could do this and that." One day one of her close friends gave her a book titled "The Magic of Believing." She read that book and it was about concentrating on and using the gifts you have rather than concentrating on what you don't have. She began to do an inventory of her life and she remembered, in high school, she graduated as the "Funniest Girl in High School." She said, "I had a scratchy voice. I didn't have beautiful looks at all. But in four years of high school, I was the funniest girl - NOT just in the senior class but of the whole high school! I could make people laugh." So she started concentrating on what she could do instead of what she couldn't do. In the '60s, at the height of her career, she made over a million dollars a year - which was a lot of money in the '60s. She died in 2012 and her name is Phyllis Diller. She had an eccentric personality; she wore wild clothes and had wild hair, but she could make people laugh and she made a living doing it. She

learned to use what she had rather than concentrating on what she didn't have.

***I want you to think about another reason this guy didn't use his talent - and sometimes why we don't. We think our small gift won't make a difference.*** We think our small offering won't make a difference. We think our small talent and ability won't make a difference. Our one vote won't make a difference, but it does. Maybe this man thought what little bit he could profit off of what the master had given him wasn't going to be much, so what was the use trying? He thought it wouldn't make a difference. Sometimes we think that. We won't sing in the choir; we won't try anything because we don't think our voice is going to make a difference; our little offering won't make a difference.

There's a well-known choral director (an orchestra director) named Sir Michael Costa who lived in the 1860s. He was an Italian who lived in England, and made it big in London as an orchestra and choral director. One day during rehearsal, the chorus was singing out and all the instruments were playing, and all of a sudden, right in the middle of it, he yelled out, "Stop!" They all stopped singing and playing. He said, "Where's the piccolo? Where's the piccolo player?" Everybody was looking at him. There was one piccolo player in the orchestra and the little guy had stopped playing. (The piccolo is a flute-like instrument, a small instrument - but it is important to an orchestra.) He didn't feel good that day and he thought, "I'm just one player, it won't make much difference, I will just quit playing." So he sat there and quit playing. To the master conductor, no instrument is unimportant or insignificant - and he noticed. That piccolo, to the Master Conductor, added to the harmony of the music. Maybe the audience wouldn't know, but the Conductor would.

Do you know that the church is full of diverse people and players and instrumentalists? We come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, and God has gifted each of us differently. You think your gift won't make a difference... but it will. The master conductor (God) will know whether

you're using it or not. God knows whether you and I are using our gifts to make a difference in the world and to help heaven come to earth.

I want to share a name with you that many of you have probably heard – especially the younger folks. There's a lady named Amy Purdy – her real name is Amelia Purdy. She's a fashion designer, clothing designer, a model, a snowboarder, a writer and a speaker. She's been interviewed by Meredith Vieira and Oprah on TV. Amy is about 41-years-old, but when she was 19-years-old, she contracted an almost-near-fatal form of meningitis. While she was in the hospital, she went into a coma and had blood septis and they had to amputate both of her legs at the knees. Now, she loved to snowboard. They said when she woke up and the doctors told her that she lost both of her legs below the knees, the first thing she said was, "Would you get me fitted for some prosthetics? I'm going to snowboard again." From then on, she set three goals: I'm not going to feel sorry for myself, I'm going to snowboard again, and if possible, God and my husband are going to help other people who are disabled, too – so they can do the things they want to do. Amy could have been afraid about walking and snowboarding again. She said, "At first I thought it would never happen. It took a few years and several different prosthetic legs before a doctor was able to fit me with the kind of prosthetics that I could snowboard." In 2014, Amy went to the Paralympics (for people that are disabled) and she won a bronze medal for snowboarding. In 2015, she won the silver medal for snowboarding. She is now a clothing designer and a motivational speaker for people that have disabilities. She said, "I could have let my fear hold me down and cause me not to make an investment in others, but I believe that God gives us gifts and abilities and he wants us to make a difference in the lives of people."

Why did Jesus come down so hard on the one-talent man? He didn't condemn him for what he did do – he condemned him for what he didn't do. He didn't invest in what God had given him. ***When we don't use the gifts that God has given us, we are not fulfilling his command to bear fruit until he comes again.*** So I want to ask you a question today – **are you doing what you can, where you are, with what God has given you?**

Maybe God has given you creativity. Maybe he's given you ability to draw, paint, sing, visit, cook, write, etc. I don't know what that talent is, but whatever God has given us, he wants us to use it until he comes again.

There's a man named Dr. Martin Root who is a Canadian speaker and writer that goes around the world leading workshops on "Bringing Heaven to Earth." One day he was leading a workshop and he said, "I want you to tell me about a time when you experienced heaven on earth. What was it like?" People shared their experiences. Afterwards, he took an ink pen, held it up, and said, "I want you to pretend this is a magic wand. You can wave it and you can help bring heaven on earth. What would that look like?" There was a real estate agent among the group of workshop participants that day and she says, "Well I don't know what I could do. I'm a realtor and I work eighty hours a week. But what I think would bring heaven on earth is to see homelessness ended. I think that would bring heaven on earth - to not see anyone homeless or hungry." He said, "Well what can you do to bring that about?" She said, "I don't know what I could do because I work eighty hours a week. What would you do?" He said, "Well you might could contribute \$5000 or you could just give a penny." Some lady in the audience said, "A penny? What difference would that make?" Finally another lady in the audience, who had a brainstorm going off in her head said, "A penny. Think of all the county employees that we have in our county government. What if we gave a mason jar to each one and ask them to put a penny in it every day to help build a homeless shelter? Think of how many employees we have and how much money - that would be a good down payment on a homeless shelter." That one realty company went on to raise \$50,000 toward the homeless shelter in their town.

What do we do with our lives? Are you using what you've been given by God to make a difference in the world? "Your life is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift to God." May God help us to discover our talents, use them, and remain faithful until He comes again. Amen.