

Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

Jesus said that the point of this parable was **twofold**. **First**, while Jesus is away, the believer is to **DO** something. And that thing they must do is **WORK**—work faithfully and diligently. **Second**, while Jesus is away, the believer is to **KNOW** something. And what they must know is that their work will be greatly rewarded **or** severely judged. Again, Christ was dealing with his return. In this parable, the master went on a journey (v. 14), and after a long time, he returned (v. 19). Christ was teaching a much-needed lesson: we must be faithful and diligent. And if we are not faithful and diligent when he returns, there will be severe judgment.

Before going any further, I think a brief explanation of talents and gifts is necessary. The talent spoken of is a weight, not a coin. The value of a talent varies as to whether it was gold, silver, or copper. Christ is probably using money to describe what he is talking about because money is one of the most understood commodities anywhere on earth. Christ was teaching

that his followers are to be faithful and diligent in whatever he gives them, whether a gift, ability, responsibility, or blessing.

Now, in this parable, Christ foretold that he was like a man who was traveling to a far country, and what he foretold happened. He traveled away from the earth and ascended into heaven for a specific purpose: to sit at the right hand of God. He is to sit there until his servants complete the work he gave them to do. When he returns, it will be the time for reward and for judgment. We read about this in **John 14:2-3**, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you with me that you may be where I am.”

Before leaving, the Lord entrusted his property to his servants. By property is meant gifts, abilities, and responsibilities. There is a verse in **Ephesians 4:8** that says it all: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” In this point, Christ says **three** things. **First**, the Lord called his own servants. The

word for servant is bond-slave. He called those who were supposedly his own and who were supposedly faithful and responsible to his service. He had brought them. They were to be his own and to serve him. Note why he called them: to put his property (gifts) into their hands while he was away. His property had to be looked after and increased and bettered while he was away. The property of the Lord means the world and the souls of men. The servants are given the very same mission and work that Jesus had: to minister to the souls of men and to the desperate of the world. The **second** thing Christ said was that the Lord gave each servant a different portion of his property to look after. The point is that each person was given a special talent (gift or responsibility). No one was left out. Each servant was therefore expected to work and serve. The **third** thing Christ said was that the Lord gave to each servant according to his ability. **Four** factors are important here. The **first** factor is that **no two** servants have the same ability: environment, opportunity, genes, heritage, training, mind, heart, discipline, initiative. Each of us is different. The **second** factor is that God endows

his property (gifts) as he wills, knowing each servant perfectly. Which is what we read in **1 Corinthians 12:11**, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” The **third** factor is that each servant receives all the gifts he needs and can use. And the **fourth** factor is that each servant has equal opportunity to be faithful in using what God has given him. The real key for us is we are to be judged on our faithfulness, not on the number of gifts or size of the work we are assigned. Which is what we can read in **Matthew 16:27**, “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”

There are **three** precious and wonderful facts here. **First**, we are “His own.” We are God’s possession it says in **Ephesians 1:14**. The **second** fact is we are taken care of by Christ. Each one of us is given “His property,” that is very special gifts, abilities, and responsibilities to look after for God. God gives us exactly what we need to

fulfill our lives and to give us purpose, meaning, and significance in life—

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to conform us to the very image of Christ himself. We read this in **Matthew 6:33**, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” The **third** fact is that the church is taken care of by Christ. During his absence, he has provided all that is necessary to care for and to advance the church. We see this in **Ephesians 4:11-13**, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

In this parable the servants treated the Lord’s goods (property) differently. **Two servants** were responsible, very responsible. They went to work immediately. They

lost no time and began to serve quickly. They were faithful and diligent. They used their abilities and energy immediately. They exerted themselves, expended their energy and effort to use what the Lord gave them. Note: the less-gifted servant worked and labored as much as the

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more-gifted servants. He did not have as many gifts, but he exerted the same initiative, energy, and effort. Again, the picture is that of a business transaction, but the point is that the two servants used what the Lord gave them; and they used their gifts faithfully and diligently. In addition, they both were successful. Each one gained and doubled what the Lord gave them. Each servant's gifts bore fruit in proportion to his gifts. The one given more, five talents, bore more—ten talents. The one given less, two talents, bore less—four talents. But both were equally successful, doubling what the Lord had given them. We read about this in **1 Corinthians 4:2**, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

One servant was irresponsible. He simply did not use the Lord's gift. But note: he was somewhat active. He spent time and energy to go out and bury the Lord's gift—he hid it. His days, his time, and his energy were to be the Lord's; but he took his life and days into his own hands. What was he doing? We are not told, but his efforts were not spent in the Lord's cause. He served only himself. He was

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worldly, lusting after the flesh (sinful nature) and possessions of this world. He was out to serve himself instead of God. Which is what we read in **Luke 8:14**, "The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches, and pleasures, and they do not mature."

This story reminds me of my two best friends, Tim, and John when we were in fourth grade through high school. We all started playing the cornet (me, the trumpet) in fourth grade. They both practiced faithfully and diligently and got better and better. I did not practice faithfully and diligently and I did not get better. I

preferred playing baseball and I practiced it faithfully and diligently, and I got better and better. Up to the point where I got a tryout as a pitcher with the Milwaukee Braves when I was 16. I did not make it, but another friend of mine did. After not making it with the Braves, I went back to practicing the trumpet faithfully and diligently and I finally caught up to Tim and John. Tim was first chair cornet, John was first chair French horn (he switched), and I was first chair trumpet.

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There are **four** lessons we can learn from this parable and from my experience. **First**, immediate work—immediate action—immediate use of God’s gifts are expected. Each hesitation—each hour—each day where maximum energy and effort are not given is a lost opportunity. Each lost opportunity equals unfaithfulness and slothfulness. What a strong example the two faithful servants were! The **second** lesson is that the efforts of the faithful and diligent will bear interest (fruit). The servant who uses his gifts faithfully and diligently will witness a manifold increase in the property of his Lord. The **third** lesson we can learn is a striking point: the

person with one talent is as responsible to use his gift as the person with many talents. And the **fourth** lesson is too often, the person who is gifted with little feels his service matters little, that it is not worth the time and effort it takes. This attitude forgets something: the gift is not ours; the gift is the Lord's. It is to be used, and full energy and effort are to be exerted in its use. The use of a single gift is to occupy what days and hours we have on earth. We are to be faithful, even in the single gifts—always faithful and always using what we have for the Lord, even if it is a single gift. The

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interesting part of work well done is the reward of more work to do. Which was the case of my baseball pitching, when I put it aside, and went back to practicing my trumpet faithfully and diligently. And that was also the experience of the first and second servants. They both acknowledged God's gifts and graces: "Master...you entrusted me" (v. 20). There is appreciation, thankfulness, privilege, and a sense of responsibility expressed. The two servants had counted it as a privilege to serve their Lord. He had given them purpose

and meaning in life and the greatest privilege in all the world is the privilege of serving the Lord himself. They were appreciative and thankful. Therefore, they were bold in approaching the Lord: “See, I have gained” (**v. 20**). Their boldness was not in a boastful spirit, but in a spirit that knew it have been faithful in what the Lord had said to do. Which is what it says in **1 John 4:17**, “In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.” The Lord commended the two servants and gave them great rewards: rulership and joy, the joy of the Lord. The Lord rewarded both servants greatly. He gave them a

twofold reward. **First**, they were given rulership: the responsibility and rule over many things in the kingdom of heaven after the Master returned. **Second**, they were given entrance into the joy of the Lord. The servants were to be ushered into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, where there is nothing but joy. Which is what we read in **Matthew 25:34**, “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are

blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world’.”

On the flipside of rewards for the work done, is the punishment for work not done, which is referred to as *stripping and separation*. Christ covers **three** points in discussing this lazy servant. Remember: Christ is speaking of a person who professes to be a Christian and is in the church. The **first** point here is the servant’s reasons for not using the gifts the Lord had entrusted into his care. He misunderstood God. The lazy servant said that the Lord is too demanding, exacting, stern, and unsympathetic – what many people refer to as the “Old Testament God.” He was a Lord who demanded much

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and was too strict. He did not allow man the right to enjoy this world and its pleasures enough. The servant felt that if he spent his time in the service of the Lord, he would miss out on life. He added that he feared—feared using and putting his talent to work for the Lord.

Therefore, he hid the Lord’s talent and did not use it to increase the Lord’s kingdom. The **second** point is God’s reasons for condemning the servant; note the vast

difference between what the Lord said and what the servant had to say. The lazy servant was wicked and worthless. He was wicked because he went about doing exactly what he wished to do, spending his time and energy on his own thing. He was worthless because he did nothing with God's gift. He buried and hid it. Christ was direct: the servant should have used the gift and served. He was without excuse. The **third** point is Christ's **twofold** judgment upon him. **First**, the worthless servant was stripped of what he had. All that he had was taken from him. **Second**, the worthless servant was thrown outside in the darkness--separated. He was cast out of the Lord's presence and banished forever. And

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there was no joy there, nothing but darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Let me finish with **two** gross errors in the thinking of the world. **First**, many people think God is hard, stern, demanding, and unsympathetic, what I earlier called "the Old Testament God." They are unwilling to follow a hard, narrow way. So, they bury and hide their God-given gifts and travel along the easy, broad way. The **second** gross

error is that others think that what they have is their own, and they can use it to live as they please. They think that what they do is no one's affair except their own, not even God's. And that is where the concept of *stripped and separated* comes into play.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Heavenly Father, you have called us away from the way of the world into the ways of your righteousness. You call us to seek **right-living** so that others may live, **justice**

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so that the marginalized and the oppressed are lifted-up and brought inside, **mercy** so that all may know your love. May we be worthy of your trust, Father. May we be a people who are unafraid to live as fully and as richly as you want us to live. Lord, hear our prayer and increase your glory and goodness in this world. Make us ones who share in both word and deed that which you have given us. We ask this in your Son's name. **Amen.**