

Theme: What Would You Do...?

Text: Matthew 25:14-30 (EHV)

¹⁴ “You see, the kingdom of heaven is like a man going on a journey. He called his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to still another one talent, each according to his own ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The servant who had received the five talents immediately put them to work and gained five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the servant who had received the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ But the servant who had received one talent went away, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The servant who received the five talents came and brought five more talents. He said, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’ ²¹ “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²² “The servant who received the two talents came and said, ‘Master, you entrusted me with two talents. See, I have gained two more talents.’ ²³ “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴ “Then the servant who received one talent came and said, ‘Master, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter seed. ²⁵ Since I was afraid, I went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’ ²⁶ “His master answered him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers so that when I came I would get my money back with interest. ²⁸ Take the talent away from him and give it to the servant who has the ten talents. ²⁹ Because everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ³⁰ Throw that worthless servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

If you were given the gift of a million dollars, what would you do with it? Would you buy your dream house (or since this is California, maybe it would be more accurate to say, “Use the million dollars to put a down payment on your dream house)? Would you buy your dream car? A boat? Would you invest it? Would you spend most of it? Save most of it? How much would you give to charity? How much would you give back to the Lord? What would you do...?

It’s kind of a fun thought exercise to imagine what you’d do with that kind of an incredible gift, isn’t it? However, I’m going to remind each one of us today that this is more than just a hypothetical, or a question that is to be left to our imagination. No, this isn’t the set of some game show where one of you lucky congregants has a check for a million dollars taped to the bottom of their seat! I’m referring to the lesson Jesus is teaching us in His “parable of the talents” from our sermon text for today.

You see, a “**talent**” in Jesus’ day was a very large unit of money. Some have estimated one **talent** to have been worth as much as 6000 days wages. That would be approximately 1 million dollars. So these **talents** that the master handed out in the parable are very, very valuable. Notice also that the master hands out these **talents** to each one of his servants “**each according to his own ability**” (v. 15).

Jesus wanted all of His hearers—including us—to take the lessons of this parable to heart and apply them to ourselves and our own lives. One of the lessons that He wants us to learn from this parable is the fact that He, the Master, has gifted us with very valuable **talents**—each one of us, just like the servants in the parable. In a sense then, we have been given a gift from our Savior that is worth more than a million dollars—or even millions of dollars. Again, the question we each need to ask ourselves is “What would you do” with such an incredibly valuable gift?

Now, of course in our day we use the word “**talent**” today in a different way in a different way than Jesus used it in this parable. We use it to refer to an “ability” or “skill.” In fact, that is a meaning and usage for the word “**talent**” that we get from this parable! The “**talents**” that Jesus gives us include all the intellectual and physical gifts we are born with, which we develop and grow as we mature.

Our “**talents**” would also include all the *material* gifts that God has placed into our hands, whether through our own work, or through gifts given to us by others (such as inheritance). Somehow we often forget that application in this parable even though a “**talent**” literally referred to money in Jesus day! He is very much interested in how we use the monetary aspect of our “**talents**”—not just in the offering plate, but throughout the rest of the week as well—since material wealth is among one of the greatest and most useful (and powerful!) gifts God has given us.

Our “**talents**” would also include the *time* Jesus gives us on earth and the *opportunities* He gives us for using those “**talents**” to serve Him by serving our neighbor. These “**talents**,” like the unit of money in Jesus’ day, are also very valuable!

A huge part of the “**talents**” Jesus has given us is something even more valuable than the things we’ve just mentioned: Our faith. Saving faith in Jesus our Savior is the greatest gift Jesus has given us, and He wants us to put that faith into action.

In fact, isn’t faith what separates the first two servants from the third servant in the parable? The “**wicked and lazy servant**” (v. 26) shows by his attitude and actions, as well as his misperception of what kind of man his master actually is, that he did not have saving faith. Think of Jesus’ explanatory words concerning this parable, “**Because everyone who has [has what? Faith!] will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have [not have what? Again, faith!], even what he has will be taken away from him.**” (v. 29). This is why the master condemns the servant in the end, saying, “**Throw that worthless servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**” (v. 30)

Want to take a guess what Jesus is referring to there with that part of this parable? Yes, He’s referring to the eternal punishment of hell—“**the outer darkness**” where “**there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!**”

That should make us sit up a little straighter in our pew this morning and make us pay serious attention to Jesus’ words in this parable...but no, this parable should not lay a “guilt trip” on us (that’s not Jesus’ intention), and it’s definitely not meant to terrify us!

First of all, what is Jesus expecting of us, His “**servants**,” in this parable? Is He being overly demanding and unreasonable? No! Notice, He gives His “**talents...each according to his own ability**” (v. 15). He does not demand from us more than He will supply! Remember what the Bible says, “**For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure**” (Philippians 2:13). He gives to each of us the gifts that are exactly right for us. In every case He provides the right combinations of abilities, responsibilities, and opportunities so that each one of us can serve in His kingdom—in the “greatest” and “smallest” of ways! Remember that Jesus also once said in this same Gospel of Matthew, “**And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward**” (Matthew 10:42).

What Jesus is looking for is faithfulness in His servants. That is what He commends His servants for in the parable—not their “production” or the amount of their accomplishments. Notice He said the exact same thing to the servant who had gained five talents as the one who had gained two:

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’” (v. 21, 23).

Jesus is essentially telling us in this parable, “Just don’t bury the **talents** I have given you!” In fact, when you read the master’s words to the lazy servant, **“you should have deposited my money with the bankers so that when I came I would get my money back with interest” (v. 27)** you are left with the impression that if this third servant had even just done that—deposited his talent in the bank so that it would gain some interest—the master would have said the same thing he said to the first two servants: **‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’**

Even the smallest acts and uses of our **“talents”** done in faith are seen by God as “good,” **“well done”** because of Jesus. So ultimately, we don’t look for our comfort and our reassurance as we look at our lives and realize how many times and how many ways we’ve been like the **“wicked and lazy servant”** and wasted our **“talents.”** We look to Jesus, our gracious Master!

Think of the grace—the “undeserved gifts” that He has given us.

✚ He’s already given us the gift of faith (which is the greatest **“talent”** of His grace He has given each of us).

✚ He has already made us His own by His death on the cross and glorious resurrection from the dead [we are referred to as **“his own servants” (v. 14)** in this parable].

✚ They are His **“talents,”** His gifts, given to us freely to freely share with others [the **“talents,”** remember, are referred to as **“his goods” (v. 14)** in the parable, and the Lord refers to the **“talents”** as **“my money”**—His money (v. 27)].

We have all been given so much. We’ve all been given very valuable **“talents,”** just like the servants in Jesus’ parable. Don’t bury your **“talents,”** your gifts, use them! We often think it has to be in some grandiose, or extravagant way, or that we should have some really outwardly impressive or “showy” **“talents”** to use. But how does the Bible speak of the gifts God has given us? Look at this list from **Romans 12** and consider some of the gifts that are considered “valuable”—many of them are things we can all do; some of them we might already be very good at, but we just haven’t used them, or seen them as “valuable” and worth using: **“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:4-8).**

Finally, again, remember who our **“Master”** is in this parable: It’s Jesus. He is our merciful Master. He is loving, He is full of grace, He has filled us with His gifts and **“talents”** of grace. Most importantly, He is forgiving! He is forgiving even for our unfaithfulness. Our unfaithfulness is one of the reasons He was faithful to us to the point of dying and paying for our sins of unfaithfulness on that horrible—yet wonderful—cross!

“What would you do...” if you were given the gift of a million dollars? The reality is, you and I have been given gifts—**“talents”**—from our Savior that are much more valuable. We pray He would move each one of us **“talented”** Christians to use them! Amen.