

Lesson: Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ 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.’ ²¹ “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!’ ²² “The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ ²³ “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!’ ²⁴ “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. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ²⁶ “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? ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ “ ‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. – NIV

Prayer of the Day:

Lord God, Almighty King, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may always look to the end of this present evil age and the day of Your righteous judgment. Keep us steadfast in true and living faith, and present us at last holy and blameless before You; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Revelation 19:11, 12, & 16

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. ... on his head are many crowns. ... On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Sermon Text:

On its face our lesson is easy. The money amount even speaks to the reality Jesus seems to be getting at. A talent was a year’s worth of wages for the people of Israel at the time. But the name clues us as believers living in 2023 of the larger significance. God wants us to use our talents, no longer monetary, to advance His Kingdom of Grace here in this world plagued by sin. It seems like a rather hard-hitting sermon on stewardship or vocation is before us. “Use it or lose it” seems to be the theme of the conversation.

However, if we walked away with just that simplistic of an understanding of the text at hand, we might be missing the point a bit. We would also, be in danger of seeing our God as a hard and perhaps cruel taskmaster, not unlike the view our third steward has of Him in our text. So perhaps a different theme is in order as we view the parable of the talents as we remember our King, a King who has saved us to serve.

As we near the end of Matthew's 28 chapters, Jesus is preparing to face the cross. In fact, He has already entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and is in the middle of a manic Monday of teaching and preaching, parables and prophecy. He condemns Pharisee and Sadducee and He prepares His disciples for all that is about to occur. Soon they will be on the other side of a 40-day whirlwind as Jesus is crucified, dies, rises, and ascends into heaven.

It would be easy to think the job was done but it will be far from it. Pentecost will visibly show those gathered around that even though Jesus is no longer visibly present in this world, He expects His followers to carry on the work. The Apostles will be on the front lines of proclaiming the truths they have lived while with Jesus. They will be entrusted with the very things of God that they might hold them out to a world that stumbles around in a fog of work righteousness and struggles to contemplate the realities of living in a sin-filled and sin-scarred world. He has just given the parable of the 10 virgins to remind them of the importance of personal preparation and the solid foundation which we find in the means of grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament and now He reminds them not to just sit around as they wait but to be active in the work, He will leave for them to do.

This, of course, is where our parable comes to life. We view the servants who are entrusted with varying amounts of wealth by the master who then heads off on a longer journey before ultimately returning to settle accounts. This kinda talk sets us on edge immediately as we contemplate the reality of the King's ultimate return on the last day and our knowledge of our sin gets us squirming with such talk. The first two fare well. They have doubled the master's talents and are therefore entrusted with far more and invited to rejoice with the master. But the third servant is where things derail.

Notice the exchange between servant and Master. *'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. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'* ²⁶ *"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? ²⁷ 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.*

This servant has an entirely inappropriate view of his master, right? He paints the picture of a harsh and terrible tyrant which led him to his actions. But by the Master's response, one wonders how much the servant truly even believed his own words. For the Master rightly points out that fear would have at least motivated the servant to do something with the talent entrusted to his care. The reality is that the servant did nothing, notice that the master calls him "lazy". Perhaps in reality the servant saw the master as harsh and unrealistic, someone who demanded too much from them and expected more effort than the servant wanted to put in. In truth, the servant didn't want to be bothered with the task.

Is there a warning worth hearing in these words of Jesus for us? Of course, there is. We all get struck by the "I don't wannas." We all at times like to believe we can't serve God the way He asks us to. Like Moses at the burning bush, we can try to come up with a million different excuses for why we can't accomplish the various and sometimes difficult tasks God sets before us. In frustration, we can even paint God as the stern and cruel judge who asks too much and just doesn't understand. In those moments, I need the "use it or lose it" sermon to point out my sin and apathy but may we never stop

there. For such a view of God did nothing for the wicked servant who was then cast out into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Such a view of God ultimately ends in hell.

Instead, aroused from our slumber may we listen to the one who gave the parable. May we see God as He has revealed Himself to us. Notice what Jesus is doing here. Our King is preparing the servants for His departure. Jesus is carefully supplying the disciples with all that they need. He has been doing so for 3 years now. As He did, He showed one far from unloving and harsh. He showed us what a dutiful servant looked like as He chased after the will of His Father in Heaven with perfect precision all that He might pass it on to you! He goes to the cross for people who ultimately are wicked and lazy servants of God full of “I don’t wanna”s and excuses that His perfect sacrifice would wash us clean yes, even empower us to become the living sacrifices Paul describes. Yes, as we contemplate the time in between and the return of the King of all creation, Jesus is the only thing that changes us. Changes us from the wicked lazy servant of the parable into the other two.

Notice that they didn’t hesitate but set to work. What was given they used, used faithfully as they awaited the return of their master. Not because they feared Him but really knew Him, a Master full of love and praise for His servants. A Master who seeks to look to all whom He has blessed on that day of His returning and because faith has been alive and well, focused on the love of Christ and yearning for His return might say, “*Come and share your master’s happiness!*”

Dear Christian, our preparation, our service, the totality of our talent it does not save us. But when God gives a talent, He wants us to use it to extend His kingdom, for the benefit of our neighbors, to the glory of His Name and because we know the saving love of God, we will do it, empowered always by the cross, empowered always in the love of our King who will one day return.

Ach, maybe I should have just let Martin Luther preach the sermon today, *I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.* Yes, You are Saved to Serve ... by the king for the king. Amen!