

12th Sun. after Pent.
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You Are a Gifted Servant!

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Matthew 25:14-30

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we are starting a four week series of messages that focus on the theme: Different Gifts, Same Grace. So we'll see each week that God has poured out his grace (undeserved love) on each of us. And that grace is not different. It's identical. He loves unconditionally: men and women, young and old, rich and poor... you and... even me. God's grace moves him to give. He gives us many things, but especially these next four weeks we'll see how he gives us our talents and abilities. He gives us spiritual gifts that we can use for the benefit of others, for the building up of Christ's church and always for the glory of God. So while God's grace to each of us is exactly the same, *the talents, abilities and resources he gives to us are different.*

Today we will look at a parable Jesus told just three days before he was put to death on the cross. Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that even though he was leaving for a while (he would suffer and die, then rise, and 40 day later ascend... but he is coming back. So he's left, for a while but he will return). Even though he was leaving for a while, he was not leaving them empty handed. He was entrusting something very important to them, abilities, talents and resources that belong to him, he entrusted to his disciples... and every believer.

It is vital that we listen carefully to the word of God before us today. If we fail to grasp what God wants us to understand here, we will be lazy. We will be couch-potato Christians who do very little for the kingdom of God, and make no mistake, countless people will needlessly suffer. When Christians fail to act, fail to use their abilities, talents and resources for the good of others and the glory of God, people suffer! And it doesn't need to be that way. But if we understand clearly what Jesus says today, we will get off the sideline and jump into the game and work hard for God, using all he's entrusted to us to the max. Listen to Matthew 25:14-30

“[The Kingdom of Heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 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. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Let's pause here already and unpack everything God wants us to absorb. In the parable, a wealthy man is leaving for some time. He has servants. He knows them well and their abilities. And he trusts them. He will allow them to manage his possessions while he is away. Not all the servants have the same ability, so he doesn't give them equal responsibility. To one he gave 5 talents, to another 2 and two the third 1. A talent is a unit of measure, so it's difficult convert the modern cash value of what he gave them. But understand that a talent was a lot. Maybe to get a rough idea, we'd say that he gave to one \$50,000. To another \$20,000 and to the third \$10,000. So all of them had a sizeable amount of money they were responsible for. They were given the money to use it wisely on behalf of their master to multiply his wealth.

So what is Jesus teaching us? He's teaching us that God has also entrusted to us abilities, talents and resources.

- 1) He wants us to understand that these things *belong to God* and are *gifts from God*. With that in mind, evaluate this statement and think about whether it's good or bad: "God wants me to return a portion of what is mine to him." [Repeat.] What's wrong with that? Sounds good, right? That's why we collect an offering... so we can return a portion of what is mine to God. Right? Wrong! What God wants us to understand is that ALL of what we have belongs to him. All of your resources, all of your abilities all of your talents: they belong to God. He is the owner. You are merely a manager. When we collect an offering, then, we are merely acknowledging God is the owner and a portion should be used to help fund the spreading of his Kingdom. But the same can be said of our time, and our talents and abilities. They belong to God too! Acknowledge that God is the giver.

We sometimes think: "If I have a particular talent or ability, then it's mine and I'll use it how I want." And how we want to use it is typically in a way that brings US honor, glory and wealth. Jesus is resetting our way of thinking here. He wants us to understand that whatever we have: time, talents and earthly possessions... everything belongs to God and is temporarily on loan to us. And on day we will give an account to master as to how we used.

- 2) *God is extremely generous in his gifts to us.* None of the servants *deserved* a single talent. The master didn't *owe* it to any of them. He only gave it because he was generous and because he decided to. We must remember that. Whatever we have from God we have only because God is generous, not because we somehow deserved it.

God has given to each of us generously as well. **Spiritual gifts:** He gave us the gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Baptism: adopting us into his family. Word: where he reveals his love for us and actions on our behalf. Lord's Supper: the body and blood for our forgiveness. Worship: We're free to worship and encourage each other. We don't deserve these things, but he gives them anyway. **Abilities and talents:** Each of us has a unique set of gifts. Skill in working with our hands, athletic ability, math, science, language, social skills, music, drawing, design. All gifts from God. Some are gifted to lead, encourage, volunteer, give. All gifts from God! **Material blessings:** All we need for body and life is given by God. Homes, cars, food, time, money. Your master is generous!

- 3) *God gives differently and according to our ability.* The gifts are different and the amounts are different. Don't compare what you have to others, be it abilities or resources. God doesn't give equally, but everyone receives generously.

Don't be jealous of other people's gifts. God gave you exactly what you need to serve him. Whatever you have, use it for him, full investing, taking risk to bring the maximum reward for your master.

In the parable, there are two different responses to the master's gifts. Let's look:

"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 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.' "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!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "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!' "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. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "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? 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. "'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 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. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It's important put to work what God has entrusted to you... whether it be little or much. It's important to put it to work *for the Kingdom*. This is what the first two servants did. One had 5 talents the other two, but both worked faithfully for their master. God calls us to do the same.

And he shows us the third servant as a warning. If we don't use it for God's glory, we are misusing his gifts. God requires us to take risks. From the third servant, we learn there are two things keep us from doing this: laziness and fear.

- 1) Laziness: Why was that third servant so sternly rebuked by his master? Was it because he had been given so little? No! It was because he didn't use what he was given.

Have you ever thought: "I am not so gifted. I don't have much to invest for God. So I won't." People sometimes think this way about their offerings. I'm not rich. I know others in the congregation have more. Since I don't have much to offer, I won't put anything in the offering plate. Friends, this is laziness with what God has entrusted to us. It's the attitude of the third servant. "Since I wasn't given much I won't do anything." Wrong! We use what we have, working hard for the Lord, whether it's little or much.

- 2) Fear: But I think the problem that went deeper than laziness for that servant was fear. The servant was afraid of his master. He considered him to be a cruel and ruthless man. He didn't see or know the man's generosity even though they were perfectly obvious. He was afraid because he didn't believe in his master's love and goodness and forgiveness. His fear paralyzed him so he just buried the talent in a field, producing it later to the master.

How do you view God and your relationship with him? If it is *indifference* then you will be lazy and/or selfish. If we understand our sin and God's holiness, but we don't know God's love and forgiveness, then we will act fearfully. We will be afraid to invest and work for the Lord, afraid we will fail and he will punish.

What will Jesus our master say to you when he returns? He has entrusted you with talents, abilities and many resources. They are his. But he's put them in your care. You are a manager. How are you use everything under your care to bring him glory? What risks are you taking for the Kingdom of God? How aggressively are you investing yourself into his Kingdom?

Do you see some failings as a servant here? What are we to do? We bow bow our heads in shame. We plead for his mercy. We repent. And we are assured of the master's gracious and generous response. Our Lord Jesus Christ has removed our failures and our guilt. He has taken them to the cross and covered them with his blood. He has cleansed us and made us perfect and

holy servants. We are heirs of God. We cling to his promise that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And now he accepts our lives that are offered as a living sacrifice. We serve him with gifts, with joy and confidence. We are free to take risks for God and his kingdom, knowing our status before him through Christ Jesus. How generous our Master is! How gifted we are! (And you are... every one of you have received generous gifts from God.) Let us respond by using the gifts he has entrusted to us with joy (not fear.) You are a gifted servant! And your master is kind and generous. Serve him aggressively with confidence and joy! Amen.