

Enter Into the Joy of the Master 2020
Matthew 25:14-29 1 Corinthians 12:4-14

Matthew 25:14-29 (New Revised Standard Version)

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.’

1 Corinthians 12:4-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

After the funeral, while cleaning out their grandmother’s attic,
a family came across a box of some very fine and exquisite china,
that nobody could remember ever having seen before.

It seems the china had been a wedding present to **her** grandmother...
... which she had put away, until just the right occasion to use it.

Years went by, there never seemed to be an occasion special enough,
so the china was passed down to her daughter, and then to the next,
each of whom stored it, without **ever having used it...**
...so tragically no one ever got to enjoy a meal off that amazing china.

In Matthew, a wealthy man is leaving to go on an extended journey,
so he assigns three of his slaves to take care of his property,
and disperses his talents to each of them according to their ability.

To us, the word talent usually refers to a natural ability or skill,
but in Matthew the word talent refers to a huge amount of money.
In the ancient world, a talent was worth 15-20 years of normal wages,
... an enormous amount to hand over to a slave.

The master leaves them with no explicit or detailed instructions,
trusting that his slaves will properly manage his property,
an incredible amount of wealth for them to control.

**It is basically theirs to do with as they wish while he is gone,
for essentially those talents belong to them until he returns...**
... truly a very sweet deal for each of them.

Like those talents the master entrusted to the slaves in the parable,
so too God's grace and blessings, our lives and all they contain
are freely given though unearned for us to enjoy and use well.
-- which is the point and lesson of the parable Jesus told.

**This parable is about responding to the graciousness of God,
with a life of faith and discipleship and useful stewardship,**
and it's an intentional and significant detail of the parable
that each servant does not receive the same gift or amount,
but some more and some less, 'according to their ability' ...
... and that upon the Master's return **there will be an accounting.**

The faithful servants each perform well, doubling their gift,
and are each productive according to their resources and abilities,
and the master commends both of them equally, vs. 21 & 23,
'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in
charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

Their reward is not based on **the amount** each servant has gained,
but upon their faithfulness, their integrity and fidelity,
which led to them entering into the joy of their master.

That reward and invitation, enter into the joy of your master
is a very meaningful and significant phrase, theologically.
I've got friend who lived with a large Irish Setter

in a very tiny apartment downtown during grad. school.

It was a tight, cramped space with very little room to move around,
and the poor dog had to be on a leash whenever they went outside.
That made for an ill-behaved, difficult and miserable pet
that folks avoided by not coming to visit at the apartment.

After he completed his dissertation and got a professorship in VA,
he moved to a farm out in the country where his dog spent his days
now wildly content facing freely across the wide-open fields.
That Irish Setter became a wonderful and delightful companion,
now that he was calm, relaxed, affectionate and a joy to be around.

God designed & created Setters to race energetically and run freely.
When my friend's dog was able to live out God's purpose and design,
it became a different & delightful creature, content & fulfilled.

God also designed and created each of us with gifts and blessings,
for us to use, develop, share & enjoy skillfully & well as God intends,
and nothing provides greater joy, satisfaction or meaning in life
than when we can freely & appropriately offer & use of our gifts.

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in Corinth indicates
that some wonderfully skilled & talented members were in conflict.
It seems some had decided that their particular gifts and talents
were somehow superior to others and so that made them better people.

To correct that destructive misunderstanding, Paul writes, vs. 4-6
Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same
Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

And all of it comes from God **as a gift** entirely undeserved & unearned,
so, there really is no place for human pride, arrogance or ego,
as if my particular gifts were any better or more important,
more favored by God or more useful & needed than anyone else's.

What God chooses & gives is always appropriate and fits perfectly,
always something wonderful, unique, meaningful & ideal to each one.
And though some may be more publicly visible than others,
all are equally reflections of God's grace, plan & purpose,
and all are critical for the church to fulfill its mission.

God intends by our unique gifts to show that we need each other,
and that we fit together like individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.
And since no one person possesses all of the gifts that are needed,
it really doesn't matter which piece of the puzzle we are,

for if any piece is missing then the picture is incomplete...
... just as ministry is incomplete without everyone's participation.

Paul also makes the point, vs. 7

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

**It's not about you or me alone, but it's all of us serving together,
toward God's purpose of building up the Church for its mission.**

As a sign or demonstration of God's gracious love and wisdom,
we are all given gifts, not for our own ego or status or pride,
but as intended to build up the church and its ministry.

Paul's message to the Corinthians and to us is that,
any emphasis upon an individual or their gift is out of balance,

for God blesses us **through our interdependence upon each other,
equipping us to do something extraordinary, to do ministry,
for that is how God intends for us to grow & for life to have meaning.**

In the parable Jesus told, in contrast to the two faithful servants,
the 3rd slave plays it safe by deciding not to participate, vs. 24-25

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, ... so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'

"I was afraid, so I buried and hid the talent you gave me"
which was to give up **the blessing that might have been.**

The third slave who buried his gift is sharply condemned, vs. 26-27

But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.'

The problem wasn't that he had squandered the talent frivolously,
but that he wasted its potential, that he ignored the opportunity
by hiding it unused and doing nothing with it for his master...

... which was to reject the gift he could have used and enjoyed.

We are called to the high adventure of Christian discipleship
and not to conserve our resources nor to quietly pass the time.

No, God expects us to put our blessings to better use.

It's not how successful we are or how much we manage to accomplish,
but that we use, enjoy and do not hide that which we've been given.

In the parable, the call and challenge from Jesus is this:

That one-talent slave was so afraid and anxious that he fails
to recognize and appreciate his master's amazing generosity,
essentially refusing to live out God's gift & blessing...

... for even if he had somehow lost that entire fortune in trading,
his master's condemnation could hardly have been any worse.

The gospel of Matthew was written during a difficult and fearful time
several decades into the life of the early Christian church,
and that fear is the concern addressed by this parable Jesus told.

Those early Christians were facing severe and harsh persecution,
and some wanted to play it safe by keeping their heads down,
and just wait quietly for the second coming of Christ.

Against that, the author of Matthew frames this parable
to answer their fearful hesitancy with a call for bold courage-
and not to bury and hide what the Master has entrusted to you...

... for as we're promised in Deuteronomy 31:8

It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear
or be dismayed."

This parable is really about God's grace, the Gospel truth,
that we are all loved, blessed and saved through Jesus Christ.

And therefore, invited to live in the Spirit, in hope, peace and joy,
to walk, enjoy and serve faithful, useful and meaningful lives,
according to God's call, perfection and purpose,
as gifted & blessed to make a difference in the world...
... and we are definitely not to bury or keep that grace to ourselves!

When we choose **faith over toxic fear** we can stand and serve boldly,
through all difficulties, all losses, all failures and pain in life,
as we learn to trust God's grace instead of relying on ourselves.

This parable is about how we chose to view and use our mortal lives,
about how we grow deeper and develop as disciples, a people of God
as we look for & accept God's call, grace & purpose for our lives,
by embracing the infinite goodness and promises of God.

I believe talents refers to so much more than just money or skills,
but actually refers to everything that God chooses to send our way.
God can and does use the full spectrum of human experience & events
to help us grow and develop as the beloved disciples of the Lord.

God doesn't waste anything of our lives to accomplish his purpose,

for everything, all of it can potentially bring us closer to the Lord,
toward the abundant, blessed and meaningful life God intends.

Sometimes our most vivid, powerful and important lessons,
are also the most painful and tragic ... for generally I've learned
far more from my failures & mistakes than when things went well.
I seem to pay more attention when it's difficult or I'm struggling.

Our wise Master decides and determines
what is best and appropriate to give, **for us to experience in life,**
& whatever it is, it's not to be fearfully hidden away or buried.

That is a word of truth and promise we especially need to hear today.
The stress, events & circumstances of this world and our lives
can seem terrifying, hopeless, dreadful and overwhelming,
and we may wonder, when will this storm of chaos finally pass?

I can't answer that,
but no doubt God is up to something good, amazing and marvelous,
and though we may not be able to see it just yet,
God is bringing gift and blessing, restoring what is broken-

-- and through our obedient and faithful and active participation,
we can grow closer and deeper, as the Lord intends,
we can find ways to serve, to be a blessing to others,
and we can share the gifts of grace that we've been given.

**So today am I living out the grace, faith, love and hope of the Gospel,
or am I living in anxious fear, panic and doubt like that 3rd slave?**

**I don't want my life to end without having eat off of that best china,
or having run and barked as freely as a Setter racing across a field,**

or without having used and enjoyed, maybe even worn out & broken
all of the gifts and blessings entrusted to me by the Lord...
... for I don't want to go to my grave
with any of the gifts & blessings God intends for me left unopened.

Each one of us has truly and lovingly been
uniquely, generously, lavishly and wonderfully gifted & blessed,
so fellow beloved children of God, **what are we doing about it? ...**

... as we read in the meditation this morning, 1 Peter 4:10
Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has
received. ... **with the strength that God supplies.**