

Using What I've Been Given 2023  
 Psalm 27:1-8, 13-14      Matthew 25:14-29

Psalm 27:1-8, 13-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock. Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord. Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! “Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek. I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

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.

When he cleaned out his grandmother’s attic, a writer described  
 coming across a box of some very fine and exquisite china,  
     **that nobody could remember ever having seen before.**  
 So checking with some of his other relatives, finally,  
     one of his great-aunts vaguely remembered something.

It seems the china was a wedding present  
 given to his grandmother's grandmother,  
 and it was the most beautiful china anyone had ever seen,

**so she put it 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 also stored it with care, **but no one ever used it...**

**... and so tragically,  
no one ever got to enjoy eating a meal off that amazing china.**

A very wealthy master is leaving to go on an extended journey,  
so he calls on three slaves to take care of all his property,  
and disperses talents to each of them **according to their ability.**

To us, the word 'talent' refers to a person's natural abilities,  
but in the Bible, a talent refers to a huge amount of money.  
A talent is equal to about 20 years of normal wages,  
**an enormous amount to go off and entrust to someone.**

The master leaves them with no explicit or detailed instructions,  
but he trusts that his slaves will manage his property properly.

**While he is gone, it's basically theirs to do with as they wish**  
for essentially the talents belong to them while he is away,  
a very sweet deal for each of the three slaves.

**This parable is about responding to the gracious goodness of God,**  
as disciples chosen, loved, healed & saved through Jesus Christ,  
each according to God's call, perfection and purpose as we are  
gifted & blessed abundantly to make a difference in the world.

"Here, this is a gift for you to enjoy and to use while I am away.  
Let it be a blessing that expands and enlarges your life,  
and let its light shine, spread & transform this world."

They don't all receive the same amount, but some more & some less,  
so no one is expected to achieve results beyond their capacity,  
and upon the master's return there will be an accounting.

The first two slaves have performed well, doubling the gift,  
each faithful according to their resources and abilities,  
and the master commends both slaves 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 then enabled them to share in the joy of the master.

In contrast to these first two faithful servants, 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, 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.'

He just buried his treasure, and acted as if it didn't exist,  
essentially refusing to receive and live out his good fortune.

The servant fearfully hid it a way and failed to do anything  
with what he was supposed to use faithfully as a blessing,  
**and gave up the intended opportunity that might have been.**

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

**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.

Considering the amount entrusted to even that one-talent slave,  
it's inconceivable that he'd hide such an amount in the backyard.

The problem wasn't that he had squandered the talent frivolously,  
but that he wasted the potential of that incredible opportunity  
and satisfaction of achieving something useful & meaningful.  
**He plays it safe rejecting the gift he could have used & enjoyed.**

We're not called to **the high adventure of Christian discipleship**  
just to conserve our resources and quietly pass the time,  
but rather, **God expects us to put our blessings to good use.**  
**It's not how successful we are or how much we can accomplish,**  
**but that we did use and not hide that which we have been given.**

The call, the message and challenge of the parable is this:  
That one-talent slave was so afraid and anxious that he fails  
to recognize and appreciate his master's gift & generosity.

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

**I believe, fear is the major message and concern of this parable.**

When this gospel of Matthew was written,  
many years had passed and still Jesus hadn't yet returned.

These early Christians were facing severe & brutal persecution,  
and some wanted to play it safe, by keeping their heads down  
just quietly hiding and waiting for the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.

Against that, the author of Matthew frames this parable of Jesus  
to answer that fearful hesitancy with a call for bold courage-  
and not to bury and hide what the Master has entrusted to you,  
**because there is the mission of discipleship to be accomplished.**

The parable's intended to answer, so until Jesus does come for us,  
what exactly does faithful and obedient discipleship look like  
in meaningful response to God's love, blessings & grace to us?

Sometimes, immobilized by fear of failure and self-doubt,  
we do settle for comfort and security, ease and convenience,  
rather than **the full-throttle adventure God intends**  
**just like that 3<sup>rd</sup> servant of the Matthew parable.**

But in Scripture "Do not be afraid" is commanded more than 70 times.

In Deut. 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.**

In Josh. 1:9            I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

And as we read earlier in Psalm 27:1,

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

The LORD is my light, that shines into the darkness of my concerns,  
which exposes and reveals, as it heals and brings new life.

The LORD is my salvation,  
my rescue, my victory, my hope, my assurance and my welfare.

The LORD is the stronghold, literally, 'the strength of my life'  
my safe and secure place of promise, protection and power.

**Knowing** that truth about the steadfast character of our God,  
we dare to ask, 'whom shall I fear?    of what should I be afraid?'

And when we choose **faith over fear**, we can stand boldly in trust,  
in full assurance of God's power, presence, promise & purpose,  
through all the challenges, losses, failures & pain in life,  
**as we learn to trust God instead of relying on ourselves.**

Continuing with the psalm, vs. 5, 14

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;  
he will set me high on a rock. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; **wait for the Lord!**

The point is that we choose a perspective and attitude of trust,  
and that doesn't bury, deny, ignore or hide in anxious fear,  
from whatever comes our way, from whatever we're facing,  
because we know God loves us and will never abandon us,  
**and so we can trust God's plan & healing purpose for us.**  
**Our sovereign God is in charge and it will all work out in the end.**

I read one time that during the filming of the movie, "Ben Hur",  
Charleton Heston struggled with trying to handle the chariot.  
He was having a terrible time with the chariot race scene,  
and Heston complained to the director, Cecil B. DeMille,  
"I can barely stay on this thing. I can't win the race."

DeMille answered,  
"Your job is to stay on it. **My job is to make sure you win.**"

Our task and call is to trust God, to follow and be faithful,  
for God has promised us that he will ensure the outcome of  
whatever the situation where God has seen fit to place us.

**This parable is about how we choose to view & use our mortal lives,  
how we can grow deeper and develop as the blessed people of God  
as we look for & welcome God's grace & purpose into our lives.**

And so in faith we're to embrace all God's gifts as opportunities,  
in trust we can risk failure, defeat or even tragic loss,  
knowing our ultimate destiny is safe and secure in the Lord.

**So, am I really trusting Jesus, his plans and purpose for me,  
enough to follow, to submit in useful trust & faithfulness?**

**Am I allowing the full richness and delight that God intends  
to fully unfold, to bless and freely flow throughout my life?**

The word talent refers to so much more than just money or skills.  
By faith it refers to all that our loving God sends our way,  
for God can and does use the full spectrum of human experience,  
to help us grow, deepen & develop as the disciples of God,  
transformed through the unfolding of his mercy & purpose.

Our lives are really a **school preparing us now for eternal life,**  
as we learn to walk in trusting faith with Jesus Christ,  
**and to become useful, faithful and obedient disciples,**  
**as we're learning to love God and to love one another.**

In God's school of discipleship nothing is ever wasted or lost.  
God uses everything of our lives to accomplish his purpose,  
for everything can potentially **bring us closer to the Lord.**

Blessings and joys will teach us about thankfulness and wonder,  
sorrows and losses can instruct us in godly dependence & trust...  
for it can all serve to guide, deepen and enlarge our faith  
as we experience God's grace along our spiritual journey.

Sometimes our most vivid, life-changing and important lessons,  
are also the most painful and tragic...and generally **I've learned  
as much if not more from my failures than when things went well.**

Our Master to whom we are beloved and precious **decides  
what is appropriate to give, for us to experience in life,**  
and whatever it is, it's not to be hidden away or denied,  
**but it's to be used** and not to be buried in the back yard.

It's about allowing the Gospel of grace to bless our living  
so that we can live into that grace & share the joy of our Master.

In the parable Jesus told about the talents given in Matthew,  
the master gave each servant an incredible blessing of wealth,  
just as God gives to us an incredible gift of grace in Christ,  
for us to use and enjoy, and certainly it's not hide it away.

So I don't want to die without ever having eaten off my best china,  
or without ever having used & enjoyed, maybe even worn out  
all the good gifts and blessings entrusted to me by God.  
I don't want to go to my grave with any of my gifts left unopened.

Each of us had been  
uniquely, generously and lavishly gifted and blessed by God,  
**so dear children of God, what are we going to do about it?**

**How will each of us choose to use well, faithfully & effectively  
the opportunities of this one and only mortal lifetime we have?**

**The parable is also asking, what have we buried and hidden away?  
What am I neglecting, afraid to use and let the Lord transform?  
What am I going to do with what God has given to me,  
the wonderful gifts & blessings entrusted to me?**

Please, as we read in 1 Peter 4:10~11

*Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received... so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.*