

November 15, 2020

Matthew 25:14-30

“What Kind of a Servant are You?”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Ave.
Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Someone has said that there are three kinds of servants in the church today - the tired, the retired, and the tireless. While there are many who are glad to ride the train of salvation, glad for the ticket away from sin and hell, who enthusiastically wave the ticket printed with the ink of Jesus' blood and punched with the nails and thorns and spear of his cross, and boast that they have the forgiveness of sins and are going to heaven, they nevertheless do not wish to sacrifice themselves for Christ and others. They are not motivated to love as they have been loved. They do not offer themselves as the master gave himself to purchase them to be his own.

It is a curious thing that we convince ourselves that with Christ there doesn't have to be any real change in us. The truth of the matter is that our being declared righteous and living that justification daily is the constant fuel for us to live differently than we did before. It's supposed to touch who we are in such a way that we embrace the work (the talents) that our master and savior has given us to do, whether that work is small or great. Now this work is not for us to earn our salvation. Rather, it flows from salvation for the support and salvation of brothers and sisters in the faith, and for those who are in unbelief.

The Parable of the Talents depicts what the kingdom of heaven is like as we wait for the return of our Master and Savior. We read: "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability." The fact that the servants receive different amounts according to their abilities tells us that we are not talking about the fundamental gift of salvation. Instead, we are talking about what happens after one comes to faith and is saved. Each person's sanctification enables them to receive a portion of the master's property - according to ability (talent) - to be used for the expansion of his property.

So, the good works of our master in saving us and his sanctification of our abilities leads him to entrust us with a portion of his property that leads to more and more good works. In this way, the undeserved kingdom of our master grows and grows for one another, and even for those who are living in the darkness of death. To one he give five talents, to another two, and to another one. So, what is a talent?

M. A. Powell, in his book *Weights and Measures* states that a talent was a lot of money in the ancient world. One talent would be about six thousand days wages, something like twenty years of a salary. So, 1 talent equals 20 years of wages for the common laborer! Therefore, in our parable 5 talents equals 100 years wages! 2 talents equals 40 years of wages! And once again, 1 talent equals 20 years of wages! This was a VERY generous and trusting master! Pastor Paul E. Jacobs writes:

You and I are a purchased people. The Son of God paid heavily for us, and He is entitled to what He bought. Heaven invested in the earth with the highest price it could pay, risking all, knowing that the returns would be worth it. In the business world there is an old axiom that is very much up-to-date when you take a look at the "bargain" you purchased last week [and Christ is looking at us] ... Each day - this day - is a good time to take inventory of Christ's investment in us, for He has poured into us His toil and love, His patience and pain.

Yes! Today is the day to think about what Jesus has given, what he sees when he presently looks at us, and what we discover about ourselves when we consider the investment he has made - that he sanctifies our abilities and entrusts us with a portion of his property. Our text goes on to say: “He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.”

So, What Kind of a Servant are You? When you boil it all down, you discover that there are really only two kinds of servants. You are either a faithful or useless servant. You are either a good slave that works according to what has been given and your ability, or you are an evil one that is lazy and just doesn’t care. The good slaves that work with what has been given to them do so not to earn heaven, but because they have faith in Christ, that is, a real and valued relationship with their Master. Evil slaves who are lazy and neglect the property that has been given to them by digging a hole and hiding it do not have faith in Christ. They are currently in the house, but they are sadly disconnected from him. The cure is to be reconnected to Jesus. What we are on the outside is, in fact, a reflection of what’s on the inside. What kind of a servant you will be is determined on the basis of your connection or disconnection to the good master of the house.

The Parable of the Talents is about all those who live in the master’s house and call themselves by his name and receive the greatest gift of him. There is nothing greater than receiving the forgiveness of sins, new life, the peace that passes all understanding, and the hope of the glories of heaven. These are all gifts of his undeserved kindness from the cross. We come to this parable as recipients of his grace. We come to the parable as owned by the incredibly generous master of the house.

And the master has left his estate for an extended period of time. After giving his servants the wonderful gift of being his servants, having purchased and won them from sin, death, and hell, he has also given them a task. He has given them portions of his property according to what they are able to do. This we so easily forget. The master who has worked has divided his estate to his servants as an investment where he expects more works to come from what he has done. This shows extreme trust on the part of the master, showing how loving he is toward us and how he sanctifies our abilities and makes us a part of his mission.

How has God gifted you? Perhaps it is five talents or two or just one. While a “talent” was a unit of money back in the time of Jesus, the stress on abilities in the gospel text reminds us that we are to use the gifts and abilities and skills (“talents” as we use the word) that God has given us in our various stations in life. Jesus is teaching us that he is the owner of who we are and what we have. God so loved us that he sent his Son, who came into this world for us, that we might be brought to faith in him by the power of the Holy Spirit in the means of grace. So, we live in the grace of his household.

God has given to each of us as trustees of the family certain earthly possessions and abilities. To some He has given more, to others less. But God does not limit our stewardship to things. God also empowers faithfulness in the use of our natural gifts, abilities, and talents. We consecrate all that we have

and all that we are to God. What we have and who we are is to be shaped and molded by what we know from the good work of Christ and his salvation. As Paul writes (Col. 3:12-17): "... whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Our parable for today casts a light on the one-talented man who buried his talent. He is the one who says to the Lord Jesus, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours." He had forgotten who is master really is. The Lord Jesus Christ is not a hard man as this man thinks. Do not become like him, forgetting the undeserved kindness of him who purchased you from sin and hell by his own blood, who loves you with an everlasting love, and who has entrusted you with talents according to your abilities for the good of the kingdom. As you wait for his return, freely serve him. But you really don't need me to say that, because you know how he has served you.

What Kind of a Servant are You? Prayerfully, you are a servant as your master was a servant to you on the cross. With 5 or 2 talents, you will make another 5 or 2. And even if you only have 1, then you will make another 1 so that the master will say of you "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." May we then keep our eyes on our master for the good and gracious master he really is - our Savior. And may we live our lives as he lived his life for us, that we may learn the meaning of the words of James (2:17), "... faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." May we be the kind of servants who have a living and active faith!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott