

## **Entrusted: Stewarding Gifts (Matthew 25:14-30)**

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In the past week I've seen or heard three situations that make me think about the point of today's message:

1. A man in a wheelchair hit a bump in the sidewalk and a folder of papers that was laying on his lap went flying everywhere. Because of his situation, he wasn't able to pick up the papers himself.
2. On a different day a different man was standing outside of a downtown restaurant, asking anyone who would listen to help him out with money or food.
3. And in another city a middle school student was being teased and bullied by his classmates because of the type of shoes that he wore to school every day.

I'll talk more about each of these situations turned out later on, but they reminded me of the simple truth that every day God provides us with OPPORTUNITIES. Opportunities to make an impact in this world for Jesus and the Kingdom of God. And as we continue this sermon series on being "Entrusted" to be good stewards of what God gives us, one way to approach it is to not miss the opportunities we have every day.

Our scripture passage this morning is from Matthew 25. Just before Jesus told the parable we're about to read – in chapter 24 – Jesus talks at length to his closest followers about what it will be like when Jesus comes again, and about living in the time of waiting before his return. Jesus concludes that chapter by making two points: one is a statement, and one is question...

1. Be ready (Keep watch) so that you'll be prepared, because none of us know when it will happen.
2. Will you be a "wise and faithful servant?" (Doing what the Lord has guided you to do while you wait)

Then chapter 25 opens with the Parable of the Ten Virgins or Bridesmaids, and it begins with the words "the kingdom of heaven is like..." And a comparison is made between five of them that were wise – that were prepared and who never lost site of what they were waiting for – and five that were foolish – that lived only for the moment and forgot about the most important thing, and then were unprepared and missed out on the biggest OPPORTUNITY that they could have hoped for.

And then Jesus tells this story...

*Matthew 25:14-30*

*14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.*

*16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.*

*19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 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." 21 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."*

*22 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." 23 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."*

*24 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; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."*

*26 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? 27 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. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29 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. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

What is a “talent,” anyway? A talent was a measurement of weight, usually 58-80 pounds. One talent of silver was worth more than 15 years’ wages. One talent of gold was worth even more.

There is a LOT to unpack from this parable, but let’s start with some basic observations:

1. Some received more “talents” than others. The only reason we’re given is that it was based on their “ability.” We do know that life isn’t always fair. The point of this parable is focused on **WHAT DO YOU DO WITH WHAT’S ENTRUSTED TO YOU?**
2. We have to understand that the three individuals weren’t given the talents so that they could benefit themselves (the profits or earning didn’t go to them), but rather earning

additional talents benefitted the Master... the one who entrusted them with the talents in the first place.

3. Two of the people used what was entrusted to them to earn more, but one was scared/apprehensive/conservative/cautious
4. The third slave/servant seems to be the most reasonable one to me. He didn't want to risk losing the talent, so he hid it. But the Master points out the fault of that servant: he was "wicked and lazy." He could have at least put the money in the bank, and safely earned interest – but he didn't even do that.

This is how the Message paraphrase describes this part of the story, when the Master confronts the 3<sup>rd</sup> slave:

- a. 26-27 "*The master was furious. 'That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest.*

It seems like the real fault of the third servant is that he wasn't willing to be reasonable with what he was given. He acted as if he didn't have any talent at all, which seemed to be the worst possible thing he could do in the Master's eyes. To put it simply: HE MISSED AN OPPORTUNITY to do something... to do anything, with what he had been entrusted with.

For the people who were listening to Jesus tell this story 2,000 years ago, they were being told how to live as they waited for Jesus return... for his second coming. Jesus was telling them not to be lazy and do nothing, but to do something with what they were entrusted with.

That same lesson applies to us today, as we continue to wait for Jesus' return. We have all been entrusted with various "talents" – money, gifts, abilities, resources – and our Lord expects us to use them.

To me, the most troubling part of this story is what happens to the "talent" that was entrusted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> slave. Did you notice what happened? The 3<sup>rd</sup> slave lost the talent. He didn't use it. He hid it. And it was taken away. I don't like to think about this, because it makes me uncomfortable, but it seems like the reality is that if we don't use what God entrusts us with to make a difference for someone else, then we'll likely lose it. We shouldn't be surprised when it's gone or when it disappears.

This reminds me of years ago when I was the Campus Minister of the Baptist Student Union at Lincoln University here in town. During our weekly worship service I had just taught on this passage and made this exact point: If we don't use the talents that God entrusts to us, they may very well be taken away from us. One of the students came up after the worship service to me with tears in her eyes as she thought about that. She was a very gifted person, especially as a singer, but she wasn't using her "talent" at that stage in her life for a greater purpose. It was a hard thing for her to think about, and it's hard for most of us to consider as well.

So what about that guy in the wheelchair, the guy standing outside the restaurant, and the kid being picked on in middle school? Immediately after the man in the wheelchair lost his folder of papers, a young man – someone who had the “talent” of having two functioning legs and 15 seconds of spare time – collected the papers and gave them back to the man. For the guy standing outside the restaurant, as another person was getting ready to walk into the restaurant, he invited the hungry man to join him for lunch. He had the “talent” of having \$10 extra dollars or so, so he put it to use. And for the tormented middle school boy, one of his classmates noticed his situation and decided to do something about it. The classmates used the money from his allowance to buy a new pair of shoes. He put his “talent,” his allowance, to work to make a difference for something greater than just himself.

Every day, we are presented with opportunities to use the “talents” that God has entrusted us with. They’re given to us not for our own benefit, but for the benefit of the kingdom of heaven. And it’s not a suggestion that we use them. It’s an expectation that we use them for God’s kingdom and glory and purpose.