

# *The Joy of Our Master*

Matthew 25:14-30

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ October 11, 2015 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘

<sup>14</sup>“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup>to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup>In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup>But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

<sup>19</sup>“After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>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.’ <sup>21</sup>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.’ <sup>22</sup>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.’ <sup>23</sup>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.’

<sup>24</sup>“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; <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ <sup>26</sup>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?’ <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 25:14-30, NRSV)

✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘ ✘

Our reading this morning comes right in the middle of a section towards the end of Matthew’s Gospel where Jesus is teaching on the coming judgment. He’s got a lot to say about it, two full chapters actually. And woven through his teaching on the end times is the central theme that God is a sovereign ruler who has infused history with intentionality and purpose. In other words, life is not a game. It’s not random but moving somewhere. Specifically, a day is coming when there will be an accounting, a judgment we will all face before our Creator. This is a reality we can choose to ignore for now, but not one we can avoid forever.

In the middle of Jesus’ teaching we find the so-called parable of the talents, a story Jesus uses to teach us something vitally important about the substance and destiny of our lives. The parable is packed full of truth and insight. The first two verses alone teach us at least three valuable lessons. Again, they read, **“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup>to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.”**

Lesson number one: Everything in this world belongs to God.

The man in this story, the master of this great estate, represents God. His estate is the world. His slaves are us. Everything on the estate belongs to the master which means that everything in the world belongs to God. This is a truth which is affirmed not only here by Jesus but all through scripture in places like Psalm 24:1 which reads, **“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.”**

Let me bring this down to earth. We tend to agree that the big things belong to God – the sun and moon, the weather, time itself – because we can’t get our hands on these things. But the things we imagine we have control over, the things

we can hold, or tame, or set foot on, or manage, we can so easily come to assume that these things belong to us. We forget that possession doesn't automatically assume ownership.

Recently I was back in the neighborhood where I used to live in Omaha and I drove past our old house. I lived in that house for seven years and when I saw it again I so badly wanted to go inside and have a look around. That place is special to me. It was the first house that Esther and I bought together. My first two kids were born when we lived in that house. It's packed with memories. But now that front door I unlocked and went through a thousand times before will no longer open for me. I don't have the key because it's not my house anymore. I'm not the owner. I'm not sure I ever really was.

Think of it this way. What do you possess right now that you will be able to hold on to forever? 100 years from now, what will you still have in your possession? Very little if anything, right? All your money and all your stuff will be in somebody else's hands. Your abilities and knowledge will have diminished or vanished altogether. Your days on this earth will be used up. Your health will be gone. Your very life will be out of your possession. The first lesson this parable teaches us is that every single thing we possess in this life ultimately belongs to God. We're not the rightful owners. Only he will be able to hold on to these things forever. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

Lesson number two, then, comes right out of lesson number one: Everything we now possess belongs to God and is therefore to be used according to *his* will.

Notice in the parable that when the master leaves his estate he "entrusts" his property to his slaves. The root of this word is trustee, and a trustee is somebody who doesn't own what he or she possesses but rather cares for the possessions of another by doing his or her best to use those possessions in the way their rightful owner would want them to be used.

Let's say you ask me to housesit for you while you go on an extended vacation. While you're gone I'm sitting in your 49ers man cave watching football one Sunday afternoon and I begin to think to myself how much better this room would look in different colors. You see, I'm not a big fan of the 49ers. Never have been. And frankly I don't much like watching my team play while I'm surrounded by so much red and gold. So that next day I go out to Home Depot and come back and redo your entire man cave in Denver Broncos' blue and orange. Much better, right? It's beautiful!

What are you going to think when you come back home? I guarantee you that's the last time you invite me to housesit, right? Because a house sitter is not supposed to act like an owner. A house sitter is a trustee, one charged to care for the house in the best interests of the owner.

We are trustees, and not owners, of everything we possess. Certainly our material wealth belongs to God. I hope we all see that. Even the clothes on your back and the money in your wallet right now ultimately belong to God. But it's not only material things - there are other resources over which we have been placed as trustees. There are intellectual resources, our knowledge and intellect, our abilities and competencies, these too are gifts given from God. There are physical resources we have been entrusted with: our time, our energy, our health, our youth. We possess relational resources. Think of all the friendships and connections you have been given for a time, the influence you have with other people which can be leveraged. And finally, we have spiritual resources from God, our faith, and prayer, and spiritual gifts to name a few.<sup>1</sup>

Can you see that God has entrusted us with so much? In Jesus' day a talent was the greatest unit of accounting in the Greek monetary system. A single talent was equivalent to approximately a lifetime of wages.<sup>2</sup> This means that in Jesus' story, even the slave who was entrusted the least amount was entrusted an enormous amount. That's you and that's me. It doesn't matter who you are, God has placed into your hands more than you have ever even begun to realize.

Since we are trustees of all these resources we are therefore to handle and manage these resources as best we can in accordance with the intentions and desires of their rightful owner. Which begs the question, what are God's intentions and desires? Simply the redemption of the whole of creation. God's overriding interest in this world is to see this world made right again - to see justice, compassion, peace, love, health and life come to once again rule the day. That is the

<sup>1</sup> I'm borrowing here from principles taught by Mike Breen in *Multiplying Missional Leaders* (self-published in 2012), 103-109.

<sup>2</sup> Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 553.

ultimate end of God's redemptive work through Christ and we are, therefore, to use what we have been entrusted with towards that end.<sup>3</sup> That's lesson number two.

Lesson number three is simple: We are not all entrusted the same amount of God's resources.

In the parable one slave gets ten talents. One gets five. The third gets one – still an enormous amount but not as much as the others. Well, the same is true of us. When it comes to the material, intellectual, physical, relational and spiritual resources God has placed in our hands we don't all possess the same amount. That's reality. And as the parable teaches us, God entrusts differing amounts according to ability. And here is an important distinction. It's not according to favor. In other words, God doesn't give more to you than to me because God loves you more than he loves me. In the same way a parent might entrust more to one child over another child for all sorts of reasons of maturity and ability, our Father in heaven does the same with us. Therefore, may the fact that God has placed different amounts in our hands never be a source of either arrogance or dejection. Remember, in the end we all have been entrusted with an enormous amount, even those of us who have been entrusted with the least.

The next lesson Jesus' story teaches us might be the most important lesson of the parable. It comes out in the way the three slaves handle what has been entrusted to them. Remember, the first two wisely took risks and invested their master's resources and, in doing so, expanded his estate. The third slave, however, was afraid and so he went and buried his master's talent in the ground.

Here's lesson number four: The critical difference between a faithful trustee and an unfaithful trustee is the difference between trust and fear.

Some of you know I coach Little League baseball. A couple years ago I had a player on my team who was, and still is, a very talented athlete. His father was a very good athlete and I think he passed that on to his son. His father, however, was also a man with very high expectations. So much so that I began to notice that when this kid's dad came to games he never played very well. His best games, in fact, were the few games his dad had to miss. As I got to know this family I realized what was going on. His dad had such high expectations for his son on the ballfield and when those expectations weren't met this kid knew that on the ride home he was going to get an earful of disappointment and maybe even a punishment. It was no wonder he never played well in front of his dad. There's nothing like the fear of failure to ensure that you won't be able to hit a well thrown fastball or field a sharply hit grounder to shortstop.

How we invest what we have received from our Heavenly Father has everything to do with how we view our Heavenly Father. If you see God as the God of limitless grace, and joy, and love, and resources that he truly is, you will have such trust in the love and provision of God that you will take what he has placed in your hands and use it, in the best sense of the word, promiscuously. You're not afraid to be generous with money because the God you serve will never be short on cash. You're willing to step out in faith and take risks to love and lead and invest and influence because you know success ultimately does not depend on you and that even when failure comes God has a way of using it for something good. You see, people who trust God tend to give away more than makes good economic sense, attempt things way beyond their paygrade, live without worry when resources seem meager, and are constantly on the lookout for even small opportunities in the most ordinary places to invest in God's Kingdom. That's how those of us live who see God as a God we can trust.

The rest of us live out of fear. Notice that the reason the third slave buries the one talent is not because he's greedy but because he's afraid. "**Master,**" he says on the day of accounting, "**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.**"

Now, a healthy fear of God is a good thing. Certainly we are called to revere and honor one who is so high above us in all ways. This slave's fear, however, is not healthy fear. He tragically miscalculates the heart of his Master. Similarly, when we come to believe that God is like a demanding father on the sidelines ready to lecture us with words of disappointment and dejection if we fail then we, too, will have miscalculated the heart of our Master. Also, if we hoard

---

<sup>3</sup> Romans 12:1-2 captures this purpose of our lives as well as any verse in scripture. We are to offer our very lives as "living sacrifices."

what we have been given out of a fear of scarcity, we miscalculate the sovereignty of our Master who tells us in scripture, **“Every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.”**<sup>4</sup>

When we forget that our ultimate security is not in the gifts we possess for a time but in the Giver of those gifts who holds time itself in his hands, then we become fearful and begin to use, or fail to use, those possessions in ways that will not, in the end, bring pleasure to our Master. A.W. Tozer once said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” That is absolutely true. And the critical difference between a faithful trustee and an unfaithful trustee all goes back to whether trust or fear comes into your mind when you think about God.

One last lesson before we close. Lesson number five: Judgment is coming.

This is a reality we can only ignore if we ignore the teachings of Jesus who warned us over and over and over again that there will come a day when we will be called to stand before God and give an account of how we have invested what has been entrusted to us. We aren’t going to be housesitting forever. And as this parable and many others like it make clear, there are two ways this can end.

If fear dominates our life and we fail to invest what we possess according to God’s interests, well then our destiny is described to us by the fate of the third slave. But here’s what’s so tragic. The master in the story wasn’t asking that third slave to hit a homerun. All he was asking was for that slave to get up to the plate and take his best swing. If he would even have invested the money in the bank so that it could earn interest over time, well that would have been *something*. But he wouldn’t even do that much. Out of fear he did nothing.

Again, I think the thing Jesus most wants us to get out of this parable is an accurate picture of the heart of God. The first two slaves trusted that at the heart of their master was joy. And so they took what he placed in their hands and they promiscuously invested it all according to his interests. And in the end, it wasn’t the amount of the return on the investment which most impressed the master – after all, how do you impress a master who already owns everything! – but it was, instead, the willingness on the part of these slaves to invest it in the first place which made such a good impression. And when these first two slaves did so they discovered that their suspicions about the heart of their master were well founded. **“Well done, good and trustworthy servant,”** the master told each slave in the end, **“you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”** Are not these the words that every single one of us in this room longs to hear one day?

These are five great and important lessons Jesus gives us in this simple story about what it means to be trustees and not owners of all we possess. Before I finish, let me invite you to consider just one practical and immediate application to these lessons.

Next week is Stewardship Commitment Sunday, that time each year when we, as a family pause to prayerfully consider how much God has placed into our hands so we can joyfully pledge a portion of those resources to God’s work in and through this congregation in the year to come. Scripture, of course, gives us the tithe as a starting place for that giving, 10% of our income, and many of us have made that our starting place or are working towards that as a starting place. Stewardship, of course, is so much bigger than just the money we pledge to the church each year, but it also does include that commitment. This is a great place to begin to apply these lessons.

My family and I will be taking time this week to carefully consider what God is calling us to give back this coming year. If you’ve made a commitment to this community then I hope you will be doing the same. As we do, let’s allow the lessons of this parable to inform our decisions. Let’s remember that everything we possess belongs to God and is to be used according to his will. We’ve been entrusted different amounts, yes, but no matter how much we’ve been entrusted we are to manage those resources out of trust and not out of fear. As we do, we can actually look forward to that day which is to come when we will give an account to how we have used what have been entrusted because we know that on that day we will be invited to come and share in joy of our master.

Amen.

---

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 50:10.



## The Next Step

### A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Matthew 25:14-30 again. Jesus tells us this vivid story to show us something about God and God's Kingdom. What's the first thing that stands out here to you?
2. Does the master in this parable seem like a fair master? Why or why not?
3. As you see it, what is the main difference between the third slave and the first two?
4. In regards to all that you possess in your life, do you tend to live as an owner or as a trustee? Why?
5. All of us fail at times to remember that what we possess ultimately belongs to God. In your case, what is it that makes you forget?
6. Jesus spends two chapters in Matthew 24 & 25 repeating the same point over and over again in different ways, specifically that a day is coming when we will be called to stand before God to give an account of our lives and how we have handled what he has entrusted to us. Why do you think he put so much emphasis on this?
7. As you consider how much of God's resources you will pledge back to the work of the church this coming year, how does Jesus' teaching in this parable inform your decision?
8. What would it mean for you to hear these words from your Heavenly Father: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master."?



### **Table to Table Question**

*A question for kids and adults to answer together*

If everything belongs to God that means our money and our stuff belong to God. Are we then using these things the way God wants us to use them?