

Treasure the Gifts of God

Pastor Matthew Ude
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Matthew 25:14-30
INI - SDG

Verse 14

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.

There are a number of these parables which begin with a master or a landowner, or a king leaving. These parables come near the end of Jesus ministry. Our current parable is spoken by Jesus after his entry into Jerusalem during the last week of before his death.

Such parables anticipate Jesus's ascension. He knows that he will soon leave his disciples, and he desires to prepare them. In the gospel of John, we are told that Jesus told his disciples:

John 16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away.

These parables are therefore a preparation for his departure and are meant to teach us what we ought to be doing while we wait for him.

You notice how nicely this parable follows and fits with the one we heard last week. There Jesus reminded us to be ready for his coming, in this one he instructs us on how we are to be ready. What we are to be doing while we wait for him.

These ascension parables teach us different things, but they all have at least two things in common.

1. the one who left will come again. Jesus will come again, and we will speak about that more next Sunday.
2. Before he leaves, he gives gifts to his people. In one parable it is a vineyard, in another a kingdom, in this one he "delivers his goods to" "his own servants." But he always gives treasure to his people before leaving.

In Ephesians four the Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 68 and reminds us that:

Ephesians 4:8 "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."

The purpose of these gifts is:

Ephesians 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Before leaving us, Jesus delivered his gifts first the apostles and then all the church. He did this so that we could continue the work of the ministry. And he assures us that if we lack anything we need, "ask and it will be given."

Jesus knowing his ascension and departure is near at hand assures us that he has given us the treasures of heaven.

Verses 15-18

15 "And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. 16 "Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. 17 "And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. 18 "But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.

What are these talents that this man gave to his servants?

A talent is a measurement of weight and in this case refers to an amount of gold or silver. Some say a talent was equivalent to 30 lbs. Others say it is more like 75 or hundred. The NIV footnotes say that 1 talent was worth more than a thousand dollars. No matter who is right, this is not a small thing that this man does. Even the one who receives only one talent receives a fortune. Even a single talent was worth at least \$10,000.

This man has not given his servant a few coins. He has given them treasures. So to Jesus has given to us the treasures of heaven.

When we think of talents, we usually think of those skills for which we personally may have an aptitude. Ann, Lila, Vanessa and others are good at playing piano and organ. Nancy is good at painting. Many of you are good at basketball. Certainly, such skills are a gift from God. Certainly, it is good to think about how we can use these skills in service to God. But such thinking is earthly thinking. It is little thinking. We want to always strive to think like God.

When Jesus talks about giving us treasures before his departure what is he thinking of?

Here we turn back to the apostle Paul. Paul explains what some of those gifts are.

Ephesians 4:11 He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

Again we can look at 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 12:8-10 8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

In both of these passages it is the preaching and teaching of God's word that takes precedent over any other gifts.

We can also look at Jesus own words just before he ascends:

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

What "goods" does Jesus deliver to his church upon his ascension? His word, His Holy Spirit, His sacraments, and His power. These are the treasures that Jesus has given to us.

The man in our parable before leaving delivers to his servants, treasures, small fortunes, enough to buy kingdoms. Christ has indeed given us riches and wealth beyond our understanding, in his word and sacraments.

Jesus has indeed given us skills that we can use in our service to him. But when we think of talents, we ought to think primarily of those treasures which are the forgiveness of sins, the word, the sacraments, the Holy Spirit, the right to pray, and all other spiritual gifts.

Ephesians 1:3 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Verses 19-30

19 "After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20 "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' 21 "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

22 "He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' 23 "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

24 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 'And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'

26 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. 27 'So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

28 'Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. 29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 30 'And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Almost every parable that Jesus tells has a point at which it becomes absurd by human standards. Some people brush over that part of the parable or they try to explain it away. But if instead we take the time to meditate on that point, we find that it is absurd to us because right there is the depth of the love of God on display. The love that God has for us is absurd by all human standards.

This parable is no exception. It is absurd by all earthly standards to condemn forever this man who buried his talents. What has this man done that is so wrong. He didn't steal. He didn't lie. Perhaps we wouldn't praise him, but we also wouldn't say that he has done anything wrong? If it was only money, we would be right.

Remember what the talents are. They are the gifts Jesus gave and continues to give to his people on the eve of his ascension. This includes forgiveness, faith, the Holy Spirit, the means of grace, and salvation.

This man took these gifts and buried them. He buried the word of God. He buried the sacraments and the forgiveness of sins, as if he has no use for them in his life.

It is as if a man were to give his fiancée the greatest diamond in the world. And she takes it off her finger and buries it in the backyard. Such an act would not only be wasteful, but it would indicate a total rejection of the man who gave her the ring.

Jesus has delivered to us treasures worth more than gold or diamonds. Yet sadly there are many like this third servant who have no use for such treasures.

It is not just a rejection of Jesus gifts, but a rejection of his love.

Jesus has showered you with his gifts and his love. He continues to do so every day. What will you do with these gifts? You can treasure them and use them. In which case they will grow and produce fruits. You may not notice these fruits, but they will be there. Or you can bury them in your backyard.

If you found a pirate treasure in your backyard, would you go and bury it again? What good would that do? The least you could do with such treasure is put it in the bank where you can use it. Jesus tells us the least we can do with his gifts are to point them in the bank where we can use them. Jesus has given these gifts to his church to be used. They are meant to be a daily part of your life.

Jesus isn't demanding that on the last day you show up to the gates of heaven and say Lord here are one or two people that I convert and brought to faith. Jesus isn't suggesting that you will be turned away because you didn't personally convert someone.

He is reminding us that he has delivered to us the treasures of heaven. We ought to make use of these treasures in our everyday life. If we have no use for them and go bury them in the yard, they will be taken away from us.

He ascended on high and gave gifts to men. These gifts are ours to use. Amen