

Time, Treasure, Talents – Overcoming our sinful Resistance
Matt 25:14-30

Brothers and sisters, I'm sure you won't mind reminiscing with me for a few minutes this morning, going back a few years before corona virus, when life was... normal.

And remembering when we were all into watching the TV show "America's got Talent." Remember that show? It was a TV contest to find the most talented people in America and give them their lucky break into the entertainment industry, and a shot at the fame and fortune which come from being a talented person.

You remember how it worked? They would hold and film auditions across the country and thousands of people come and try out. Then judges pick the top fifty or so and the competition begins.

Then each week the show was televised and the public would vote for the acts they thought were the most talented. The ones with the most votes moved on to the next round and the

acts with the least votes got eliminated until the winner was determined.

And it was really interesting to see what people would bring forward as their particular "talent".

Now normally we think of talents as a particular gift or ability, and the show featured the usual singing and dancing and magic acts, but there were some really unusual ones too – fire breathers, sword swallows, people who drum on garbage bins, a lady who dressed up as giant blowfish and jumped around the stage for 3 minutes, and some girl who screamed everything she said – that was her talent?!

Some of these acts, for obvious reasons, did not make it past the judges in the first round of auditions.

But some of them – just managed to squeak by. The judges felt they had potential and they wanted to see if a second chance would help them improve their act and refine their talent.

And we could say that a question was posed to these people.

It was as if the judges were saying “You have this talent – these skills and abilities, we are giving you a chance to develop it... what will you do with it?” The judges, and we as the viewing audience, were waiting to see.

And reminiscing about the America’s Got Talent contest reminds me of our scripture passage this morning where the master calls his servants and gives them talents – and this action poses a similar question for the servants. What would they do with them? Eventually the master is going to come back and find and find out.

Now the difference between America’s Got Talent and the Parable of the Talents is in the backstory.

America’s Got Talent is based on the American dream backstory - where a nobody can become a somebody! All they need to do is catch a break, and indeed we saw that lucky break happen for Kevin Skinner back in 2009.

He was an unemployed chicken catcher – but America’s got Talent gave him his lucky break and his singing talent won the contest and brought him fame, fortune and a better life.

But The Parable of the Talents is set in the context of the biblical story line. It’s backstory is Creation, The Fall into sin, God’s plan for Redemption and the promise of a New Creation and that has some implications for the talents we’ve been given, for the talents we think can bring us fortune and fame.

In fact the backstory of this parable runs contrary to the popular notion of what our talents can do for us – if we could only catch a lucky break with them - and it even goes so far as to redefine what it means to be talented, especially for Christians.

So let’s look at what Jesus wants to teach us in this parable.

The parable tells of a master who is going away so he calls his servants to him and entrusts his property to them – now its

pretty easy to determine that the master represents Jesus and the servants are his followers.

But what might his property be? Well consider who Christ is...

He is the Word of God by whom all things were made. So his property is the entire world, the universe.

He is also the Word of God that was spoken to the Prophets so they might say "Thus says the Lord God". So, Christ's property is also the right to speak to people on God's behalf with God's authority

And finally Jesus is the Word of God, made flesh, come to dwell among us to take on our sin and suffering and offer his life to pay our debt of sin. So Christ's property is forgiveness and grace and mercy.

Are you following along so far with who Christ is and what his property is that He is distributing among His followers? Ok let's keep going...

So, the parable is teaching us that Christ entrusts his servants with the universe, the earth, his authority, and his forgiveness and grace - and entrusts it to them in varying proportions, each according to their abilities.

To one he gives 5 talents, to the other 2 talents and the last servant receives 1 talent.

Now a word about the word talent. A "talenton" which is what Jesus is referring to here in the Greek, was the scale, the balance, used to measure how much a pile of gold or silver was worth. You would put your gold on the scale and the "talenton" would point to the marks on the scale indicating if it was 1, 2 or 5 talenton.

Now Jesus could have simply said the master gave his servants a bag of gold, or precious jewels, or property- but he specifically says "talenton". That's because the master wants his servants to understand that although this is a gift – it still belongs to Him and he will weigh and measure what they have done with it.

So, this means Christ will weigh and measure out what we have done with the universe, the earth, His authority, and His forgiveness and grace that He gives to each of us.

We often think of our talents as the skills and abilities that we have, but what Jesus says here pushes us to change our way of thinking about talents to primarily be about our *“calling”* to steward the earth and our *“receiving forgiveness and grace”* from God.

So if we think biblically we will define a “Talented” person as a steward of the earth, with specific skills and abilities, who has received God’s grace and forgiveness, and expects to be “weighed” to see how they have measured out with what they have been given.

Now that certainly puts things in a different perspective doesn’t it? We start to understand God’s expectations for what we are to do with the gifts and blessings that He gives, or rather *assigns* to us.

But expectations or assignments can be a mixed blessing can’t they.

On one hand they give us clarity and purpose for what we should do, on the other hand it can be overwhelming and intimidating, or a bit imposing... after all these are God-sized expectations and assignments.

Now this mixed blessing illustrated in comparing how the servants react to being entrusted with their talents – the first two servants waste no time and immediately go out and put the money to work. They are eager and willing to do so and their efforts result in a doubling of the talents they receive.

But the third servant reacts differently – he goes away and he buries the money in a hole in the ground.

And when their Master returns and settles accounts with them... their actions that show what they thought of their Masters expectations and assignment.

The first and second servants are eager to report back what they have done – Master you gave us this and look! We gained more! The master’s expectations and assignment have brought out the best them and they went out did something and they have more, they have grown, and they want to show the Master that.

But the third servant has taken a different approach. What he says to the Master reveals that he resents being given the talent. He doesn’t appreciate the assignment because it comes with the expectation that he **must** do something with it and he doesn’t want that responsibility.

Now some might argue that this was because he was only given one talent – but biblical scholars tell us that even one talent was worth approximately a lifetimes worth of wages, so getting 1 talent was the equivalent of winning the lottery.

Now most people I know play the lottery primarily because they want financial freedom. If they won the lottery, they would no longer be a slave to their paycheck and they would

be free. That’s the advertising slogan for the Lottery right – imagine the freedom!

Well friends, that’s what Christ gives us in a talent. That’s what this parable is meant to teach us. That Christ entrusts us with his grace and forgiveness. Not only are we saved from sin – we are saved to serve. We owed a debt that we couldn’t pay and Christ pays it for us, we’ve won the lottery as it were so our debt is cancelled – imagine the freedom!

What are we doing with Christ’s grace and forgiveness? Because Christ has given it to us with the expectation, and the assignment to use it!

Now I would think we’d jump at that chance – like we would jump at winning the lottery right?

But the sad fact is that as the initial experience of our salvation in Christ fades away, we struggle like the third servant, and we are tempted to take what Christ has done for them and we give into the temptation to hide it away and we

begin to resent the expectation and assignment which comes from it. Why?

Perhaps it's because we think being a Christian means living a narrow, joyless life with no fun.

Perhaps we are being perfectionistic and we are afraid of failing to do things right so we opt not to try at all.

Perhaps we think we start to think we have enough talent of their own – they are skilled and gifted and they do good things to take care of the world and we really don't see our need for the grace and forgiveness from Christ.

But this is what sets the first two servants apart. The first two servants recognize that the talent they receive is primarily the riches of Christ's forgiveness and grace.

This inspires them, or empowers them to go and do something with it.

Now take notice the Master doesn't specify exactly what they are to do with it, and the story doesn't give the details of that either.

All that is told to us is that when they put the "forgiveness and grace "to work" it generated more "talent."

So much for the Christian life being rigid and narrow – there's incredible freedom being implied here in this parable.

You see friends, when we truly receive Christ's forgiveness and grace – not just casually acknowledge it – but when we truly receive it – by admitting our sins and faults. When we put it to work in our lives, in our families, in our workplaces, in our schools, in our community and in our church- it doubles.

Forgiveness and grace generate more forgiveness and grace.

Forgiveness and grace are the proper starting place for us to use our gifts and abilities in the church, forgiveness and grace are essential to our call to steward the earth, and forgiveness

and grace are the connecting points for us to go out and bless people in our community!

Brothers and sisters, when Christ returns and each one of us is called to account for what we done with the forgiveness and grace we've been given we'll say "Lord, you gave me your life – look, I've lived my life for you - your forgiveness and grace motivated me to give, to serve, to love, to help others, to work at discovering, developing and taking care of your world. Here it is - I give it back to you."

And the parable teaches us it doesn't matter how much talent you received or how much you generated with it – because the Master says to both servants "Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with little, now I will put you in charge of many things!"

But to the servant who tried to hide his resentment and laziness by essentially telling the master that he did nothing with the grace and forgiveness given to him, and that it was the master's fault because his expectations were too high --

the master says "throw this worthless servant out into darkness!"

The message is clear for us friends – playing it safe as Christians and doing nothing with the talents Christ has entrusted us with – the forgiveness and grace, the gifts and abilities, our time and resources and our call to steward the earth – playing it safe with these and not putting them wholeheartedly to work in the Kingdom of God for any reason is not acceptable, in fact it is a manifestation of our old sinful nature that we need to fight against and overcome.

Now please don't misunderstand we're not working for, or earning our salvation – that came with the talent being entrusted to us.

Instead we need to ask ourselves – what have we done with the grace and forgiveness Christ has given us.

If we've buried it – we need to dig it up and put it to work – there's still time before our master returns.

We can acknowledge that the resistance and reluctance that we might feel about being expected to go out and bless others in Jesus name – comes from our sinful nature.

We can confess that to Jesus – and here's the amazing part, as we confess how our sin makes us hesitant and unwilling to go and invest the grace and mercy we've received... Jesus forgives us for that and gives us more grace and mercy!

So – brothers and sisters as you hear this message today, may the Holy Spirit give us the conviction to confess our sin that we may receive more grace and mercy and be re-enthused about the calling Christ has given us to put the “talent” to work.

May the Holy Spirit guard us from our sinful nature – not only as it makes us resistant to put God's grace to work in blessing others – but from the sneaky and subtle way it will want to twist this message and what is being said so that we hear it as a guilt trip, and we our resentment will grow instead of the talent.

So Lord Jesus, send your Holy Spirit upon us to bring Godly conviction about our sinful nature – give us more grace and forgiveness and open our eyes to see and our hearts to receive freedom from the miserly spirit that hoards your riches and resents what you ask of us.

So – brothers and sister, I want to encourage us. Let us take all that the word “talent” can encompass – especially the money that we have recently been given as a Church - and use it!

Invest it as a blessing for someone at your work, in your family, in our community, invest it as a tangible means of how God has blessed you with His grace and forgiveness, so that it multiplies in other people's lives and God's Kingdom grows.

And when our master does return... we will be the servant who says Look! See what I've done with what you given us.

And our master will say to us – Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few

things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master!

Amen.