

[OPENING SLIDE]

*"Living in the Joy of the Master"*<sup>1</sup>

*"His master said to him, '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.'"*

**Introduction**

[SLIDE # 2] So, try to imagine this scene. You are in your mid to late thirties. You've got a good ten years under your belt in your chosen profession, and your boss comes in one day and says, "I'm going to be diversifying the company, striking out on another venture. I have a gift for you. You've proven yourself more than capable. I'd like to gift you 40 years wages – in advance – *and* leave the company in your hands. I'll be back in a few years to check in." What do say?"

What would *you* say? How would you react? What would your priorities be? First steps on the way to enjoying your wealth ... making the most of the opportunity?

Now ... here's another question. What is ***the*** *most precious treasure* that Jesus has entrusted to His Church – to *this* Church? What is it that is of the greatest value?

**Main Point:** Let the redeemed of Jesus joyfully live in trust and service to their Savior, as we look forward to the Day of His return.

Engaged in faithful witness and service *to the Gospel*, we are ...

[SLIDE # 3]

DIFFERENTLY GIFTED, EQUALLY LOVED

Amen.

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"The Day Is Surely Drawing Near!" What "day"? That of Jesus' return. What will it bring? "Sudden destruction, labor pains, 'like a thief in the night.'" There will be "wailing, plundering, a laying waste" – "distress and anguish" – "ruin and devastation" – "darkness and gloom." (1 Thessalonians 5; Zephaniah 1)

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of both the theme and content for this sermon are adapted from Schmitt, *CPR*, 21:4, 35-36; and Schmidt, *CJ*, Fall 2011, 303-305; gleaned at 36,000 feet, on a flight from Boston to New Orleans. Apparently being closer to God does produce better results. Just saying! ☺

[SLIDE # 4]

*"But you are not of the night, nor the darkness ... you are children of light, children of the day."* (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5)

Yes, for the redeemed of Jesus, we are not terrified – but rather, we rejoice at the prospect of our Savior's return. As Jesus once exhorted His disciples:

*"Lift up you heads and rejoice, for your salvation is at hand."*  
(Psalm 24:7-10; Luke 21:28)

Thus, like the first, the second of Jesus' "Nighttime Stories" in Matthew 25 speaks not to frighten the children of God, but excite them ... to fuel and to fire our desire to please the Father out of the deep storehouse of grace we have received.

Today's story being related in four chapters ...

[SLIDE # 5] CAPITAL SUPPLIED

<sup>14</sup> **"For it** [the Kingdom of heaven – "that (what Linda?) gracious reign and rule of Christ in the hearts and lives of His disciples"] **will be like a man** [Jesus] **going on a journey** ["He ascended into heaven .... From whence He will come to judge the living and the dead<sup>2</sup>], **who called his servants** [you and me] **and entrusted to them** [it's all gift here] **his property** [His mission and His ministry – His very self].

<sup>15</sup> **To one he gave** [again, it's all by grace] **five talents** [ca. 100 year's wages for a common day-laborer], **to another two** [40 year's wages], **to another one** [20 year's wages], **each according to his ability** [*dunamis*]. **Then he went away.**

✚ A critical thought! Serving Jesus in His "absence" does not earn our place in the Kingdom. He freely gives that ... long before the work begins. Setting up this Parable as a story of grace, not works. Of what God would do, not us.

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<sup>2</sup> "This Traveler comes first to *call* servants, he comes second to *check* on their service. The first advent is for recruiting, the second for accounting: discipleship and judgment." (Bruner, *Matthew*, 2:902)

- ✚ Wherein, with those gifts, the Father is also extremely liberal (I'd be good with 20 years wages) – holding nothing back – not even His own Son!
- ✚ Giving to each *"according to his/her ability"* (no grace greater or less than the other ... we are, after all, "differently gifted, equally loved!")
- ✚ It's not the amount that makes us faithful – you will never be entrusted with more than you can manage ... especially since it is *"God who gives the growth."*  
(1 Corinthians 1 3:6-7) God owns, we manage. God entrusts, we invest.

#### [SLIDE # 6] GROWTH ANTICIPATED

***<sup>16</sup> He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made ["gained, profited, won"<sup>3</sup>] five talents more. <sup>17</sup> So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. <sup>18</sup> But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.***

The word *"at once"* is most instructive here ... (in the original) it stands at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis. *"Immediately"* – the single most exciting word in the parable, indicating "that this servant takes whatever the Lord gives and goes *instantly* to work with it, with enthusiasm." (Bruner, *Matthew*, 2:903) With joy!

Which leaves how the "stock market" pans out to the Lord. Get this! 2/3 of those gifted took what they received and put it to work. They *"went" ... "traded" ... "made" ... "all aggressive words"* (Bruner) ... [indicating that] waiting is not an option. There is no such thing as a Christian who stands still. (Barclay)

- ✚ Until our Lord's return, His design is for us to put the gifts He entrusted to us – as individuals and as a congregation – to work.

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<sup>3</sup> Bruner, 904; a *gospel*/verb last used in Matt 18, where Jesus commends the process of resolving sin in the community: "You have *won* your brother." (18:15)

- Which gifts? Not spelled out, as we are all – according to personality, life experiences and circumstances – different ... examples might be administration, finances, learning languages, witness to others, praying, comfort, teaching Sunday school, etc.

+ Wherein, profit or loss is not the point – rather, it's simply the joy of *who* we get to serve ... anticipating – with each new day – what our Lord has in mind for us to do ... *"We were meant to live for so much more!"* (Switchfoot) Indeed!

+ With blessing coming in the service itself; reward as *"houses, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, children, lands ... 100-fold"* here, and in eternity (Matthew 19:29) – again, all by grace freely given; radically demonstrated on Calvary's cross!

+ The Lord (His name and kingdom) *would* profit from our labor. Why *wouldn't* He, given what our salvation cost Him?

## [SLIDE # 7] ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIRED

**<sup>19</sup> Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.** <sup>20</sup> And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, '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.' <sup>22</sup> And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' <sup>23</sup> His master said to him, '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.' <sup>24</sup> He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard (exacting – sclerosis) man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no 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 answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? <sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. **<sup>29</sup> For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.**

<sup>30</sup> *And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness (that "reward of self-preoccupation"<sup>4</sup>).  
In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

✚ To do nothing is *not* an option – at least not without consequence for both the Kingdom, and the one gifted who doesn't respond in joy.

- Burying the talent is not an expression "*fearing*" the Lord. "It is tantamount to – (taking the treasure) – putting one's lamp under a bushel basket (Matthew 5:15)." (Stegman *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 4:313)
- Of whom no one is perfect in this: "*No not one.*" (Romans 3:10)

✚ But God is generous ... merciful. Pardon in Christ is the greatest gift He can give ... that He has given ... a gift that not only covers our past failures to honor Him in/with all things, but that now fuels and fires all that we will do in His name.

✚ ἰδε! *Look* (said with a smile)! This is not drudgery! They find their work exciting.

[SLIDE # 8] *[I will be off script a bit 😊]* "Invitation/Challenge" Matrix: #1 (folks are cozy, comfortable) ... #2 (the church is dead – find another one) ... #3 (folks are stressed, not seeing the joy in their service) ... #4 (folks are totally engaged – all in).

- Where are you? I also see a portrait in #1 (faith without works) ... #2 (no faith, no works – again get out of that church as quick as possible) ... #3 (works where faith isn't motivation) ... #4 (faith *and* works in full bloom)!
- Where are you? What would it take to move you out of #1/#3 to #4?

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<sup>4</sup> Bruner, 911

- Nothing short of the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus’ death and resurrection. “He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! ... making us giddy – with the prospect of God’s having gifted us, as we join Him in the adventure!

✚ Faithfulness in what we’re given by grace leads to *greater* usefulness.

- “Heavenly rewards are not beds of rest, they are posts of duty. The reward of duty (done) is a duty (to be done).” (Bruner, *Matthew*, 2:907; quoting rabbinical maxim noted by T. W. Manson in *Jeremias, Parables*, 61 n. 49)
- Again, what is the greatest treasure that we are given to steward by our heavenly Father? The Gospel of Jesus Christ itself! The Gospel!!!

[SLIDE # 9] THAT CHAPTER (IV) OF OUR STORY, EVEN NOW IS BEING WRITTEN

Wherein, the point of Jesus’s Parable is not about “doubling your money and accumulating wealth. It is about living ... about investing ... about taking risks ... about Jesus himself and what he has done and what is about to happen,” when a people are as excited as He is for Him to return. (Buchanan, *Feasting on the Word*, 4:310)

### **Conclusion**

I recently had a conversation with Oromo Pastor Adam Tefari, of whom I asked if people in his culture retired, like we do here in America. “Our old people do not retire,” he said. “They keep working until they can’t.”

The final chapters of our story are even now being written. There is still time. Jesus is coming back – and soon. And so, we work ... thinking big, being generous, and remembering that for now – by God’s sheer grace – He smiles on us ... as ones who are willing to do whatever it takes to tell a new generation about His love.

[SLIDE # 10]

DIFFERENTLY GIFTED, EQUALLY LOVED

*Amen.*

*Friday E-mail:*

Something caught my attention in an article I once read. The author said:

"Don't stay home; 17% of all fatal accidents occur there. Don't walk on the street or sidewalk; 14% of fatal accidents occur there. Don't travel by air, rail or water, since 16% of all fatal accidents happen on one of these! Only 1/10 of 1% of fatal accidents occur in church. Any questions as to where you should be?" SYOS!

But with a caveat: that as safe as it may be here, it's not where our Lord calls us to remain. Where, all told the plan of the Master in Matthew 25:14-30 – my sermon text for Sunday – was a success. He entrusted 8 talents of gold, and got back 15. So scripting the end of 2/3 of His servants who actively sought labor on their Lord's behalf.

Disciples of Jesus, the Master's servants are *still* being called to do no less. Wherein, unlike the one poor servant, the end of our story, in part, has yet to be written. There is still time. And so, we work ... thinking big, being generous, and remembering that, for now – and by God's grace – He smiles on us ... as ones who are willing to risk whatever it takes to tell a new generation about His love.

Our task is just that simple. Our task is just that joyful.

Simply put:

*"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."* [1 Peter 4:10]

Here, "heavenly rewards are not beds of rest, they are posts of duty. 'The reward of (such a) duty (done) is a duty (to be done).'" (Bruner, 2:907; noted by Manson in Jeremias, Parables, 61 n. 49)

Where, in God's economy of grace, HE ENTRUSTS TO US MANY THINGS, THAT WE MIGHT PRODUCE SOMETHING, FOR HE WHO GAVE US EVERYTHING.

In Christ, our God did just that. He gave ... everything!

For the second time ... SYOS!

*Friday E-mail (Version 2):*

Stewards of God's Grace,

With no disrespect to any of us who may own one of the following products, I recently came across this variation on a popular nighttime prayer. It goes like this:

*"Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray my Cuisinart to keep.*

*I pray my stocks are on the rise, and that my analyst is wise,*

*That all the wine I sip is white and that my hot tub's watertight,*

*That racquetball won't get too tough, that all my sushi's fresh enough.*

*I pray my new iPhone still works, that my career won't lose its perks,*

*My microwave won't radiate, my condo won't depreciate.*

*I pray my health club doesn't close and that my money market grows.*

*If I go broke before I wake, I pray my Volvo they won't take."*

A little humorous it's a "prayer" that *may* speak to how we sometimes view the concept of Christian stewardship – of managing the resources with which our Lord has entrusted us to use and to share. Yes, far too often we take a myopic view of the goods and services that fill our lives, forgetting *from* Whom they are given, and *to* Whom they would be rendered.

This Sunday's sermon text speaks to this. In the second of His end time parables from Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus reminds us of the joy of living in the Master's service. Jesus wants us to be happy, especially as we enlist gifts of time, talent and treasure in service to Him and His Kingdom. *All* of our resources are but a vehicle to glorify Him and bless others – all extensions of our living "up, in and out."

Let's reflect on this beautiful truth this coming Sunday, all the while rejoicing that when it came to giving, our good and gracious God neither *tithed* nor held back anything. He gave it all!

SYOS