

## Sensing and Seizing our Opportunity Matt. 25:14-30

**Intro.** What will it be like when Jesus returns? Last Sunday we considered the first of three parables that describe that day. The first parable emphasizes the need for watchfulness because as Jesus said, “**you do not know the day or the hour.**” Christ’s coming will be sudden and without advance notice. He will come at a time when He is not expected and when most aren’t looking for Him. In light of this, believers must remain vigilant at all times. We must remain sober and serious living our lives as though this could be the day. We can be ready and prepared for His coming only as we continue or persevere in our faith. **I Jn. 2:28 - And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming.**

The tale of the wise and foolish virgins in **vs.1-13** illustrates the spiritual preparation necessary for all who will be admitted into Christ’s Kingdom. The foolish virgins who lacked oil for their lamps were unsaved. They were not born again by God’s Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, they lacked the fuel necessary to produce the light of a righteous testimony. They were judged unfaithful because they lacked the spiritual preparation God requires.

This second parable is a perfect complement to the wise and foolish virgins. The first parable shows how inward spiritual preparation is necessary to enter Christ’s kingdom. But according to this second parable, outward performance is also essential. Even though God knows our hearts, it is outward performance or service that proves we are spiritually prepared! Believers don’t serve the Lord to be saved...we’re saved by grace. We serve the Lord because we are saved! Just as the virgins were prepared by waiting for the Lord, the servants in **vs.14-30** are prepared by working for the Lord.

**1. The Sovereign Distribution - vs.14, 15 - "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.**

The adverb **again**, connects this parable to the one that precedes it. In **v. 1** Jesus said, "**At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like... The kingdom of Heaven** refers to the time when Christ’s rule is established on earth. The situation at this time will be like that of a man who entrusts his wealth to servants while he is away. **The man** refers to Christ, the rightful owner of everything. The **journey** represents Christ’s ascension to Heaven, where He is now seated at the right hand of His Father. **His servants** represent all who believe and profess allegiance to Christ and His Kingdom. **His property** and the **talents** He distributes to **his servants** represent the spiritual wealth given to every person who trusts Jesus and is saved.

Notice how each of three servants was given a different amount of talents. The first was given 5, the second was given 2, and the third was given 1. To understand what a **talent** represents, we need to erase the English definition reflected in the title of the TV show called, *America’s Got Talent*. The **talent** here in **Matt. 25** was a large sum of silver. It was equivalent to the wages paid a common laborer for about 20 yrs. of work. **5 talents** would therefore be wages paid for 100 yrs. of work! In those days, the rich often entrusted their wealth to servants they hoped they could trust. These servants were like finance managers hired by professional athletes. They were responsible to wisely invest their employer’s wealth so it would grow and increase. This was their opportunity for reward, advancement and in some cases emancipation.

Notice the **property** entrusted to the servants still belonged to the wealthy man. The servants were merely trustees of the rich man’s wealth. This is repeated throughout the parable.

In **v.14** the talents are said to be **his property** / in **v.18** they're referred to as **His master's money**. Even the lazy servant given 1 talent knew that talent wasn't his own. In **v.25** he speaks to his master and calls it **your talent**. / Finally, in **v.27**, the wealthy man referred to the talents as **my money**.

So what do these **talents** represent? They represent the many blessings and benefits we have from God in Christ. A **talent** is the spiritual wealth God has placed in our hands to invest. Paul referred to the gracious blessings lavished on Israel in **Rom. 9:4, 5** where He wrote, **Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!** But as we know, Israel behaved like the wicked servant in this parable and squandered this God given wealth.

The **talents** seem to specifically represent the spiritual gifts sovereignly distributed among God's people. **Eph. 4:8** says, **When He (Jesus) ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.** Ten days after Jesus ascended to Heaven, the Holy Spirit came on the disciples waiting in the Upper Room. At that time and ever since that time, the Lord has been gifting His people with spiritual abilities to be used in His service. These kingdom building abilities are commonly called *pneumatica* or spiritual gifts. It's a separate study, but seven specific gifts are named in **Rom. 12:6-8**. When this list is combined with gifts listed in other NT passages, the list doubles.

Like the wealthy man in the parable, these gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit and given to profit Christ's estate or Kingdom. As we find in the parable, these God given abilities for service vary from person to person, but each gift is essential. They are sacred trusts to be used for the edification and extension of Christ's Kingdom. Like the servants in the parable, these talents represent opportunities to glorify our Master by the efforts we contribute to His cause.

**2. The Servant's Opportunity - vs.16-18 - The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.**

Even though this parable is similar to the **parable of the pounds** in **Lk.19**, the two parables are distinct. The parables were given on different occasions to different audiences. In the parable of the pounds each servant was given an equal amount of money. But here, different amounts are given according to the **abilities** of each servant. I think the pound represents the grace of God in general. That parable asks the question, what did you do with the grace given to you? While that parable was spoken to the multitude, this parable was spoken to the inner circle of Christ's disciples.

So the talents represent each believer's opportunity to serve the Lord while He is away. **Eph.2:10 - For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** They are opportunities a faithful servant will sense and seize.

When someone is exceptionally gifted whether athletically, musically or intellectually, we say that person has been given a "*golden opportunity*." Those who develop their ability and use it to its full potential can accomplish many things. That's the thought here. Spiritual gifts provide us with opportunities to serve the King of kings and accomplish things that count for eternity.

The servant with significant ability or capacity was given **5 talents**. The servant with average ability was given **2 talents**. Then to the servant with only minimal ability, 1 talent was given. Because God knows us perfectly, He tailors our giftedness to our ability. God doesn't pour a lake into a cup. (That's what I did the night I tried to make coffee and put an undersized carafe under coffee maker.)

And God doesn't pour a cupful into a lake either. Some people are given big gifts that open the door to big opportunities. Others are gifted in an average way. Still others have smaller gifts. Regardless of the size or the nature of the talent we receive, each gift is essential and every believer is given at least one. We should view the gift as both a privilege and responsibility. The gift enables us to return love and faithfulness to the One who loves us and gave His life to save us.

One lesson that emerges from this parable can be stated this way...*The amount God gave isn't important. The important thing is what we do with the talent we received.* A believer can be extraordinarily gifted yet do nothing with his gifts. But another believer can have minimal gifts and use them in a great way. Faithfulness is proved by what we do with the talent God gave us!

Notice how the servant who received 5 talents and the servant who received 2 talents **went at once** and put their master's talents to work. They wasted no time. They sensed the opportunity and seized it. Through trading, they doubled the amount placed in their hands. A grace gift is like master's money because of its potential for growth and multiplication. Like money, spiritual wealth multiplies when invested. Whenever people are being saved and helped to grow, spiritual wealth has been at work!

But notice how **v.18** begins...**But the man.** In contrast with the other two, the third servant given just one talent dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money. His thought was to hide it. He buried the treasure he received. The same can be done with the spiritual blessings and abilities God gives us! We can hide them instead of putting them to work. We can ignore the enablement God has given. To do that, is to forfeit our opportunities and squander the Lord's wealth. And notice...the unfaithful servant was the servant with only 1 talent. Both the guy with great ability and the guy with some ability were faithful with the talents they received. The unfaithful servant was the guy with only minimal ability. We might say, it was the average church-goer who didn't invest the talent he was given. He was the one who squandered His Lord's wealth. So instead at looking around to find someone super-gifted person who really needs to hear this message...the parable forces us to look at the ordinary person most of us see when we look in the mirror.

**3. The Service Evaluation - vs.19-28 - "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. "'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.**

The parable says a day came when the wealthy man came home and confronted his servants. And so Jesus will return and each person will be called to give account of what we've done. To believers Paul wrote, **II Cor. 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.**

**v. 19** says it was **After a long time**. Jesus had been preparing His disciples for the long interval between His ascension and His return. During this long age of grace, each believer is asked to invest the spiritual wealth entrusted to us. And as we found previously in **Matt. 24**, Jesus, like the wealthy man, will return at a time when He is not expected.

The faithful servants stepped up to their master first because they were prepared and confident (**vs. 20-23**). Both the servant with 5 talents and the servant with 2 talents were happy to report a 100% increase. Each servant had doubled the value of the talent entrusted to them. They put their gift to work with equal diligence and faithfulness. As a result, when **v. 21** is compared **with v. 23**, their commendation and reward was identical. The lesson is this...*When gifts are put to work with equal diligence (no matter how great or small the gifts are)...the reward will be equal.* We might say, "God is an equal opportunity employer." Every Christian has the same opportunity to be faithful and every Christian has the same opportunity to be equally rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

It doesn't matter if your gift is teaching / ruling / helps / or showing mercy. What matters is that we are faithful with what we have been given. And it doesn't matter where your gift is used either. Some of the greatest teachers in the world aren't Seminary professors. They are people who work with a little class of 5 or 10 children. (And our new Children's Ministry Director, Linnae Crosby says, "Amen, preach it Pastor Dean!") Some gifted to rule or administer, arrange the nursery schedule and keep the Sunday School running. People with the gift of helps may be ushers or greeters / they may help their neighbor cut his lawn / scrub the church kitchen / or work in the clothing room at CTM. Those with the gift of showing mercy may visit shut-ins / visit inmates at Genesee County Jail / serve at Kindred Spirit / or serve as a professional Christian counselor. It doesn't matter what the gift is or where it's used! What matters is that we recognize, develop and put to work the gift entrusted to us...and that we do it for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom. Above everything else, the primary and greatest reward will be to hear our Lord's commendation ..."**Well done, good and faithful servant.**" This should be what inspires us to serve Him.

The master also rewarded his faithful servants with increased opportunity. Having performed faithfully with a small task, the faithful servant was rewarded with something greater. But a third reward was also given to the faithful servant. To the two faithful servants the master said, **Come and share your master's happiness!** This reward entitled these faithful servants to share everything their master owned. You might call this the "*key to the city*" reward. It includes entrance into the heavenly kingdom and participation in all of the mind-blowing glories awaiting us there.

But then the unfaithful servant stepped forward. He said, **'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed...** "*I know your ways...you are demanding and ruthless. You take things that don't belong to you.*" By these statements, the wicked servant exposed his underlying problem. He didn't know his master...He only thought he did. So in an attempt to clear himself, he resorted to "blame-shifting." He tried to deflect blame for his unfaithfulness from himself to his master.

*"Knowing you as I do, I was afraid."* Are there believers who don't develop and use their gift because they're afraid or insecure? Be sure of it! Throughout the Bible many of God's servants were afraid at one time or another. Fear can paralyze us from doing what God has asked us to do. This is why God so often said..."*be of good courage / don't be afraid / I am with you*". What is it that frightens us? I think some are afraid of making a mistake...afraid they can't do what God is asking them. "*What if I drop the ball?*" *What if I can't live up to my commitment? What if I say the wrong thing? What if I am misunderstood or ridiculed?*" Rather than claiming the promise..."I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," gifted people are often side-lined by their insecurities. They reason..."I'll just put the gift aside for a later time when I'm more experienced and knowledgeable in the faith."

The unfaithful servant convinced himself his master would be pleased when he gave the talent back to him. *"Here it is Lord. See how carefully I protected it? You gave me one talent and that's what I'm now giving back to you. Nothing lost, nothing gained!"*

But what if we were to apply his reasoning to the matter of spiritual gifts? *"Lord, you gave me the gift of helps. I didn't actually help anybody, but at least I didn't lose the gift you gave me."* / *"Lord, you gave me the ability to teach. And I'm happy to say I never taught anything incorrect because I didn't use the gift."* / *"Lord, you gave me the ability to rule. Because working with people is so difficult and even hazardous, I preferred to let others do it."* / *"Lord, you gave me the gift of exhortation, but I was afraid I wouldn't have the right words to say."* / *"Lord, you gave me the gift of mercy, but I was afraid I'd become too emotionally involved in other people's problems."*

Listen friends, these excuses are as illegitimate as the one the wicked servant offered. Think about it. If the master was a hard man, (and Christ isn't) all the more reason to make sure his money was managed wisely. That's exactly how the master in the parable saw the situation. In **v. 26** he asked a question that went like this... *"So, you think I'm a hard man, do you?"* Then in **v. 27** he says, *"Well, if I'm a hard man, here's what you should have done."* The master didn't agree that he's a hard man, he simply repeated what the servant thought and shows how irrational that made his response. The servant was left without excuse. And the thing he feared most, happened. He said he was afraid to lose his master's wealth so he hid it. For all the years when his master was away, nothing was gained. In the end he lost both his master's wealth and his opportunity to serve him. Like muscles that atrophy and waste away if not exercised, the unfaithful servant forfeited the opportunity to serve his master. Taken from him was the single talent he had received. His inactivity proved he was untrustworthy and unprofitable. The opportunity for him to be or do otherwise had passed him by.

**4. The Sobering Loss - vs. 29-30 - For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'**

Like the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the issue here is faithfulness. The wicked servant had no faith in his master. He didn't know his master though he claimed he did! He feared his master. He didn't realize the wealth entrusted to him actually enabled him to do his master's will. And friends, we can be certain of this...God will never ask us to do something He has not enabled us to do. He will never ask us to do something beyond the capacity of His enabling grace! The unfaithful servant didn't follow his master's instructions or fulfill his master's wishes. Because he was faithless, wicked and lazy his inactivity proved he was worthless to his master.

Like the virgins in the previous parable, this servant represents religious people. They may look like Christians, but they aren't saved. They have been exposed to God's grace...they've chosen to hang around God's people...but they don't know the saving power of Jesus. They have never really come to the cross or received the salvation, new life and enablement only Jesus can provide. Like the foolish maidens of the previous parable, they are without the Holy Spirit who energizes the life and service that pleases God.

Notice that when Jesus returns He will not say, **well done** to those who have not done the job well! He will only call good and faithful those whose performance fits that description. The unfaithful servant was both disobedient and lazy. He held his master's gift with disregard for his master's instructions. He seems to have hoped his master would never return. Tragically, this servant never awoke to the danger he was in until it was too late. The fact that he was unsaved is proved by the master's response.

The master said, “**throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**” This is Hell...the place of torment where the lost are separated from God forever. Though created for the devil and his angels, Hell is the punishment ahead for all who refuse Christ’s salvation and are unprepared when He returns.

Let me briefly recap the lessons taught by this parable:

1. Every Christian should see himself or herself as Christ’s servant who has received some ability to be used in the service of the King. While Jesus is away we have these years of our life to develop and utilize our gifts in active service for Him. It’s imperative for us to sense the opportunity and seize it while there is time.
2. Faith by itself is shown to be invalid in the lives of those who fail to serve the Lord in some way with the gifts He has given. **Jas. 2:17** says, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.** How can love for Christ be genuine where there’s no desire to please Him? What excuse can justify such disregard?
3. What response will we offer our Savior when He returns and our faithfulness is tested? More important than that...what will He say to us?

The parables teach the reward for faithfulness will far outweigh anything we might imagine. God’s intention is to reward us beyond anything we deserve. Jesus boldly declared the amazing opportunity that is ours to sense and seize or neglect and forfeit. But there’s a flip side to these lessons. There’s a time when Christ will return and His offer will expire. We dare not underestimate the loss suffered if we have been unfaithful with the grace gifts God has entrusted to us.