



Loving Jesus, Loving People, Plowing a Counter-Culture

SERMON TEXT: Matthew 25: 14-30

KEY POINT: Christians are called to use their gifts and resources to further the Kingdom of God.

FOR LEADERS

- **Apprenticeship!** *As a Gospel-centered church, it's our hope that Emergence would be the leadership locus of our community, and as a Community Leader, you are very much on the front lines of that! Who are you personally investing in? Who in your group could lead in their own right if you gave them the proper guidance and encouragement? Pray about who God has placed around you and consider what a next step in their faith, their leadership and their ministry might be today*

GETTING STARTED

- [1] Communities Video:** Watch this week's community extras video!
- [2] Icebreaker:** Did you earn an allowance as a child? What chores were required of you?
- [3] Opener:** What stood out to you from the sermon this week? Did you find anything particularly helpful or eye opening?

A MAN ON A JOURNEY

Ask for a volunteer to read Matthew 25:14-30.

This week we learned that a "talent" was actually a measurement of weight used to denote a large sum of money. These talents could also represent things that God has given us in our lives which He expects us to use to further His Kingdom.

- [1]** As you read this parable, what sorts of things do these talents represent in your own life?
- [2]** What can we infer from the fact that, in this parable, the wealth belongs to the master, and not the servants?
- [3]** Ryan mentioned this weekend that it's the job of the Christian to increase our Master's assets. What are these assets, and what does this look like practically?
- [4]** A sad reality for the church today is that there are MANY Christians who find themselves perfectly content living their lives passively and doing little to nothing for the Kingdom of God. Why do you think this is?
- [5]** Do you feel that there are any ways in which the church is contributing to this passive-Christianity? What can we do to correct this?
- [6]** If your life was evaluated right now, do you think God would determine you to be faithful? Why or why not?
- [7]** Given what we read from this parable, how does God define what it means to be "good and faithful?"
- [8]** What areas of your own life do you feel you could grow in faithfulness with what God's entrusted to you?



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HEART OF THE GOOD AND FAITHFUL

- [9]** Consider that, despite having a vastly different amount of talents, the first two men in this parable receive equal reward for their faithfulness. How do you think this should influence our attitude toward others with more / less or different resources than us?
- [10]** Notice that in this parable slavery is being used as a metaphor for discipleship. In what way(s) are disciples similar to slaves? What does this communicate about our relationship to God?
- [11]** Where have you personally experienced some of the “joy of the Master” in your own life? Share a time where you’ve seen God’s blessing as a result of faithfulness.

THE UNFAITHFUL

One key point from the sermon this week was that being entrusted with much is not necessarily a guarantee of faithfulness. In fact, as Ryan pointed out, one huge temptation for those with abundant resources is the temptation to simply treat Jesus as a Spiritual add-on and settle for “good enough,” instead of truly sacrificing for God’s Kingdom. Meanwhile, it’s just as easy for those with less to put off sacrificing until they “have more,” which also leads to treating Jesus as an add-on and never truly furthering the Kingdom.

- [12]** Of these two, which do you tend to resonate with more personally?
- [13]** Consider the actions of the “wicked” servant in this parable. In what way is failure to invest in God’s Kingdom connected to sin?
- [14]** Obviously, the biggest implication of this parable is that we are all entrusted with resources to steward for God’s Kingdom. What, in your own life, do you feel you’re “burying?”
- [15]** One problem with the third slave in this parable is that he was unwilling to engage in risk. What does this teach us about risk within the Kingdom of God? In what way is risk essential to discipleship?
- [16]** Is there any place in your own life you feel God is calling you to take a risk?

PRAYER

- [1]** Pray that Jesus would reveal things in your life that he wants you to use to further the Kingdom.
- [2]** Pray for God to search your heart and show you areas that you need to be risking yourself for the sake of God’s Kingdom instead of your own.

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LEADER'S COMMENTARY

“Talents”

- As Ryan mentioned in the message, the word “talent” is potentially misleading. It does not refer to things we are good at like sports, music, or cooking. Here, a talent is a large sum of money, probably silver (about 30 kilograms). Equaling about six thousand denarii, a talent of silver is what an average day laborer could expect to earn in half a lifetime.
- On the other hand, the talents of this parable symbolize things like talents, and much more as well. We should be thinking about anything with which God has entrusted us. Your groups will discuss this in question 1.

Loans and Banking

- In verse 27, the master suggests that the third servant could have at least invested the money with bankers, which would have yielded interest. Jesus told this parable long before anything like modern banking was available. These “bankers” would have been individual entrepreneurs or moneylenders. Both Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:35–38 forbid charging interest when lending to the poor, and Deuteronomy 23:19–20 expands this principle to all Israelites (“your brother”), while allowing interest to be charged only to Gentiles. So, if we assume that the characters in this parable are Jewish, the collecting of interest makes sense if the bankers are Gentiles. Note, however, that we also know that in Jesus’ day the rabbis had already drawn a distinction between reasonable forms of interest and excessive usury. Nevertheless, Jesus is not commenting on the Torah’s lending regulations. He simply presupposes that there were such investors to whom one could loan money at interest.

Slavery and Servants

- The question of slavery in the Bible may come up in your conversation, particularly in relation to question 7. Remember that slavery in Jesus’ world looked a lot different than what we typically think of today. In the resource provided on our website - <http://emergencenj.org/blog/2019/01/04> we observe that slaves in the Greco-Roman world differed from freedpersons in four ways:
 - (1) They could not represent themselves in legal matters;
 - (2) they were subject to seizure and arrest in ways that freedpersons were not;
 - (3) their occupation was determined by their master;
 - (4) they had to live where their master decided (more information can be found in the link provided).
- Other than this, circumstances and treatment depended on the specific situation and the specific master. When Jesus and the New Testament writers use slavery as a metaphor, they are not approving of the institution itself—they are simply pointing out the similarity between in and the various ways in which we find ourselves. Donald A. Carson’s observation in his Matthew commentary is helpful: “this parable no more condones slavery than comparing Jesus’ coming to that of a thief (24:42–44) condones theft.”
- Those of us who find the slave metaphor off-putting should remember two things. First, Paul himself, who speaks in this way extensively, acknowledges the crudeness of such language, when he tells the Roman Christians, “I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations” (Rom 6:19). He is speaking in a purposely vivid way to make an impression on his readers. Second, in this passage (Romans 6), slavery is used as a metaphor, not just for discipleship, but for the

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natural state of bondage to sin (vv. 15–23). There are no “free agents”—those not enslaved to God are slaves of sin and death.

Is God a harsh Master?

- Consider the attitude of the unfaithful servant. He sees the master as harsh, rather than kind, and even displays his own selfish motives—it is because his master “reaps where he did not sow and gathers where he scattered no seed” (v. 26) that he does not bother to increase what he’s been given. In other words, it is because it is the master who would reap the benefits of his labor that he didn’t want to exert effort. This reveals an unconverted heart, who does not see the glorify of God as a good worth pursuing for its own sake. Someone who has been truly born again loves not just the Master’s gifts, but the Master himself.