

“Gifted for the LORD”—Matthew 25:14-15

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Gifted for the LORD”, is Matthew 25:14-15 → *For the kingdom of heaven will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How do you use God’s money? For many this question may conjure up pictures of a congregational voters’ meeting adopting a working budget for the next year. “God’s money” can be viewed as the money in “the church coffers” since it was given to God as an act of worship in our worship services. Yahweh seems to reinforce this concept when rebuking His people for robbing Him in Malachi 3:8 → *Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me. But you say, “How have we robbed you?” In your tithes and contributions . . . which were given by His people at worship in the temple. He rebuked them for not bringing their *tithes* (literally, “a tenth” referring to a tenth portion of their income) *and contributions as He had commanded them.* Thus, “God’s money” also extended to that which was in their pockets and possession.*

By the way, I’m not the one who brought up the subject of the money

in your pockets and possession. Actually, Jesus brought it up in His parable of the talents in our text today. In Jesus' day a talent was a form of currency. A silver talent constituted 20 years of wages for a common laborer and a gold talent could be thirty times more valuable! Thus, Jesus was talking about a sizable amount of money in this parable. Well . . . the parable really isn't exclusively about money per se but rather about how you have been gifted by and for the Lord in many ways.

It is a story about a man who gave various amounts of money to three of his servants, entrusting his money to their care while he went away *on a journey*. These servants acted as stewards in the sense that they continually worked with and cared for property which didn't belong to them. Also, their work and care was done **to benefit the master**, not themselves. It's really a foreign concept to our culture's way of thinking. Who would think of working for someone else so that they'd benefit financially, let alone be willing to work without pay?

The master of the parable represents Jesus, the servants stand for you and I, and the talents symbolize the various gifts God places into our stewardship. As servants of Jesus in His kingdom it is very important that we recognize His Lordship over everything in the universe—including our lives! As Christians we confess belief "in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." This confession is in accord with the words of Psalm 24:1 → *The earth is the LORD's and the fullness*

thereof, the world and those who dwell therein. **Everything**—life, the resources you use for living, stuff, money, relationships—**everything** in your life is a gift from God which He entrusts into your care for a time. Thus, one focus of Jesus' story is not so much concerned about what you have or how much you have as it is about your striving to be faithful in using that with which the Lord has **gifted you**. What you have really doesn't belong to you.

This is very important to remember because, in the midst of working so hard to acquire a good life, get ahead, build a secure, comfortable living and so forth, one can easily fall into idolatry. One can use, even abuse others with a sense of entitlement, forgetting that there is nothing *you have that you did not receive* and boasting as *if you did not receive it* (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:7). The warning of Deuteronomy 8:17-18 is applicable: *Beware lest you say in your heart, "My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth." You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He Who gives you power to get wealth.* We can even become self-centered when it comes to our relationship with the Lord as the man in the parable *who had received the one talent*. He *went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money* (cf. Matthew 25:18) apparently because of his perspective of his master.

According to Matthew 25:24-25, when the day of accounting came, this servant said: *Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where*

you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours. Interesting that this man had to explain his actions and perception of his master—a perception which lived in fear of him instead of love for him. Fear disabled him from being a good steward and he seems to be saying more about himself than his master. Since the only one who would benefit was his master and there was nothing in it for himself, why bother? Thus, the master characterized him as a *wicked and slothful* (i.e. lazy) *servant*. (cf. Matthew 25:26)

Thus, another focus of the parable is **faithfulness** in your use of how you've been gifted for the LORD. The parable contrasts the acts of faithfulness with the act of unfaithfulness—an expression of faith alongside an expression of a lack of faith. Jesus is using this story to describe *the kingdom of heaven* (cf. Matthew 25:1,14). That's us, Christians functioning as Christ's Church in the midst of a world under the deception of the devil. This kingdom is Christ's rule of grace in the hearts of believers by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel. Thus, any spiritual gifts, talents, abilities, time and possessions are used in the context of the gift of faith! Living a trust in God's forgiving grace in Jesus Christ leads us to recognize the importance of using our gifts to serve God's purposes and not our own desires.

This gift of faith is nourished, strengthened and sustained in the

exercise of that faith around His Word and sacraments, His means of grace. God will also strengthen, increase, and support to the end the good work that He has begun in you (cf. Philippians 1:6), if you cling to God's Word, pray diligently, abide in God's goodness, and faithfully use the gifts you received (cf. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. 11, Par. 21). When it comes to faith, working from a despise and contempt for Jesus and His gifts with arrogance rather than repentance and humility can cause you to lose the faith. Thus, the serious punishment given to this *wicked and slothful servant* (cf. Matthew 25:30). Instead, as you exercise your faith you will grow in even more in love for and service to your Lord. This was the point of Jesus' words in Matthew 25:29 → *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.*

As "slaves of Jesus" we have been gifted by Him and for Him so that His kingdom will grow and flourish eternally! Since His kingdom grows and flourishes as people repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness and eternal salvation (i.e. receive the privilege to *enter into the joy of their master* eternally), **we want the results to belong to Him!** Speaking about the use of spiritual gifts in a Christian congregation 1 Corinthians 12:7 says: ***To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*** This *common good* is to bring people to God , *Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the*

truth in Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4). He lived in perfect obedience to God's law **for you!** His sacrificial death was perfectly sufficient **for the forgiveness of your sins!** His resurrection from the dead has guaranteed His welcoming you into His eternal kingdom with the words, *Well done, good and faithful servant . . . Enter into the joy of your master!* (cf. Matthew 25:21,23)

As stewards who have been gifted with God's stuff, both physical and spiritual, we desire to use it to build His kingdom, the Church. Even something as commonplace as eating lunch is to nourish your body for service to Him! According to 1 Peter 4:10-11, the Holy Spirit empowers you to live in service to Jesus each day with the desire to share His grace. It says: *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

*For by (Christ) **all things** were created, in heaven and on earth,*

*. . . **through Him and for Him.*** (Colossians 1:16)

You are gifted for the Lord! Amen.

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