

Christmas 1
December 28, 2008

Text: Matthew 25:14-30
The Parable of the Talents

Good Morning to you!

I also wish you a very Merry Christmas, on this the 4th day of Christmas. I trust that you had a blessed Christmas day, and that there was much giving and receiving of gifts.

Permit me to ask a question: How many of you either singly or jointly – gave gifts for Christmas Day?

For those of you who cannot see, everyone's hands are raised!
Awesome!!

I have a follow-up question: What is your expectation of the receiver of your gift? When we give gifts, we have expectations of that giving process. When you gave your gift, what was it that you expected?

(A “thank you” is most likely an obvious answer. But expectations run deeper than just a “thank you.”)

(“liking the gift,”
“use” the gift.”)

I have gifts for three people. I have a dollar. Who would like a dollar?

I have two dollars. Who would like two dollars?

I have a five dollar bill. Who would like five dollars?

One thing we need to clarify is that what I gave you is truly not my money, but whose? God's. It is entrusted to me by God. I just gave away eight dollars. So what does that have to do with you coming to church this morning? I am so glad you asked that question.

I invite you to reach for a pew bible. Please turn to page 987, and to the center of the right hand column, to the new section titled, “The Parable of the Talents.”

I believe it is important to note that in Matthew, this parable was the last such recorded teaching told by Christ. Jesus taught this parable just

two days before he was crucified. Therefore, to me, this parable contains a very profound message for all of us. The challenge for us this morning is to understand the important significance of Jesus' final earthly teaching.

Before we begin our study of this parable, it is important to understand that Jesus used earthly materials to teach spiritual truths. Therefore, in unpacking the "Parable of the Talents," we need to think on two levels: the world and God's kingdom.

Page 987, verse 14:

14 "For *it is*

What is? ...God's Kingdom

14 "For *it is* just like a man *about* to go on a journey, who called his own slaves (SERVANTS)

Who did the man call? "His own slave, servants. The man called his own... This is important to remember!!

And this man did what?

and entrusted his possessions to them.

The man trusted what to his servants? "His possessions. So, what was given is the man's own possessions.

I stated before that we need to think on two levels: the world and spiritual truths. For the world, we are referring to a very rich man. On the spiritual level, who is the man? God the Father!! And what is given are the Father's priceless possessions! Awesome!

15 "To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.

One talent is a weight of silver equal to approximately 15 years of work for the ancient laborer.

"To one, he gave five talents." Who has the five dollar bill? Symbolically, you are holding 75 years worth of your current or, if retired, 75 years of your last pay scale. Awesome, isn't it?

"To another, two talents..." Who has the two dollars I gave? Symbolically, you are holding 30 years worth of your current or, if retired, your last pay scale. Yeah, don't you wish, right?

"To another, one talent..." Who is holding the one dollar I gave? Symbolically, you are holding approximately fifteen years worth of your current or, if you are retired, your last pay scale.

So what was given to each of these three servants was quite valuable. And just as you shared with me what your expectations are for gifts you gave, I believe that the man, God the Father, also expected: receive a

“thank you;” a confirmation it will be liked; but more importantly, you will use it.

Well, let’s read on and see what these three did with this man’s possessions. Remember, our money is not truly ours; it is the Lord’s. “All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee.”

16 "Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents.

Who has the five dollar bill? You invested wisely and now that five dollars is worth ten dollars, or, symbolically, 150 years worth of your current or last pay scale! You should live so long, eh?

17 "In the same manner the one who *had received* the two *talents* gained two more.

Who has the two dollars? You also doubled your gift which now, symbolically, is worth 60 years of your current or last pay scale.

18 "But he who received the one *talent* went away, and dug a *hole* in the ground and hid his master's money.

Who has the one dollar I gave? Your gift apparently did not fit the expectations of the man, God the Father. Of the three expectations everyone stated this morning, receiving a “thank you” we don’t know about; “confirmation of it being liked” we don’t know about; but one thing we do know, you did not use it. When you and I give an expensive gift and learn that it is not used, what is our very human re-action? Disappointment to the highest degree, I would imagine. Do you think that the Lord also has the same re-action?

Let’s read on...

19 "Now after a long time Jesus knew that after His death and resurrection, he would ascend to the Father. However, he did promise to return, but in human terms, this return would only be after a long time.

Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Jesus, at His return, will settle accounts given to each of us. Apparently, there are expectations with the investment Jesus made in each of us.

20 "The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.'

The holder of the five dollars? Well done!

21 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

22 "Also the one who *had received* the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.'
The holder of the two dollars? Well done!

23 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

24 "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no *seed*.

25 'And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.'

The holder of the one dollar? Uh oh....

What the holder of the one talent did was quite common in the ancient mid-east – to bury their treasure. Safe to be sure, but did such an action meet the expectations of the giver of the talent. Remember the three expectations: thank you; like it; use it.

26 "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no *seed*.

27 'Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my *money* back with interest.

“...with interest”

When we hear the term interest, we most likely think of financial interest earned on money invested in an account of some sort.

However, the original Greek has a different, a more philosophical, spiritual bent on the meaning of interest. The ancient way of looking at interest is that it be an offspring, produced from a mother or a seed; to bring forth. Thus, interest is the offspring of invested money.

It is obvious that this person had no heart to work for the kingdom of God, but only in saving his own skin. We are expected to take risks for the Lord. Corporately –that is, as a full body of Christ – we have! And look at the blessings God has given us! We have moved into a new spiritual home worth more than three times what we left!

28 'Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.'

29 "For to everyone who has, *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.

30 "Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This parable, this teaching of Jesus, ends with judgment. In the second half of chapter 25, Jesus expands upon this topic of judgment. Placement of this parable of the talents at this juncture in scripture needs comment. It is just two days before His crucifixion. Jesus knows His earthly time is very short. Jesus' objective at this point is to drive home two very basic teachings:

1. Interest is expected; produce, offspring is expected in the investment Jesus made in the apostles and in us. Jesus did not want his investment in us to lie fallow, but to grow.

2. Failure to return interest on the investment Jesus has made in the apostles and in us means no entrance into the kingdom. Failure to be responsible servants with the investments made in us will be dealt with harshly. Apathy, a couch potato mentality toward the use of God's blessings, is not an option. Servants of the Most High God are held accountable.

The subject of talents as given in this parable is not to be viewed just as money, but as responsibilities the Lord has given us. Jesus knew he was soon leaving this planet to be with the Father. Therefore, he gave instructions for us to wisely use the time we have before he returns; to use this time for the spread of His kingdom. The bottom line basic issue is one of accountability. The person who diligently prepares for the coming kingdom by investing time, talent, and treasure for Christ and His kingdom will be rewarded.

We now are entering a new phase in the life of this congregation known as St. Bartholomew's. Much, much work on the part of many, many people has been done to reach this point in time. The focus for the past five years has been upon getting here. And now that we are here, our focus ought to change, to be directed to what scripture over and over, calls us to do: grow the kingdom of God.

For more than a generation, God has singled out this congregation to be a witness for Him. God has made an investment in us. Because we returned an offspring, produce, on His investment, we have been rewarded, blessed. But this is not the time to relax and sit back to "enjoy" our new digs. God has now provided us with means to bring more lost souls into the kingdom. God's investment in us has increased. I firmly believe God has increased our talents from two to five. Isn't this quite scriptural? To those who have, (what?) more will be given. We have been given much. Therefore, God has increased His expectations of His blessings to us. Our responsibilities to Him have increased; our

accountability to Him has increased. As the parable of the talents reveals, it is not the amount each person has that matters, but what we do with what has been given to each and everyone of us.

What did we say about expectations of giving gifts: expect thanks, that the gift is liked; and that the gift is used. We will be called by God to give an account of our faithfulness with the blessings God has given us. Therefore, it would be prudent for all of us to use our time, talents and treasure diligently in order to serve God completely in whatever we do.

I close with a quote from John Wesley:

When questioned about the remarkable success of his followers, he said, “They are all at it, and always at it.”