

Over the past couple of months, we have been reading through the gospel of Matthew. Today we will be wrapping up this series. I hope that by reading through most of the gospel that we have been able to pick up on some themes and get a sense of its construction.

The gospel writer Matthew constructed his gospel with a purpose. He wasn't simply recording history but trying to tell it with a certain theological understanding.

We turn now to a parable that many of us have heard before. This passage is sometimes called the Parable of the Talents. This is one of the 4 stories that Jesus tells that are recorded by Matthew that deal with the implications of the end times. This parable is also recorded by the gospel writer Luke.

One aspect of this story that is helpful to know concerns the definition of the word "talent." How much is a talent? A talent is a huge sum of money. In fact, a talent is about 15 years' worth of salary for a day laborer.

So, transferring this sum to today's money, we are going to read a story in which one person is given over \$6 million, a second person is given over \$3 million, and a third person is given over \$1 million.

Let's turn now to the text of Scripture from Matthew 25:14-30 and read about these 3 people who were given millions of dollars and what they did with it.

Read Matthew 25:14-30

There are a couple of observations about this story. The first observation is that when the master left on his journey he did not tell the three slaves what to do with the talents that they were given. He did not tell them to make good investments. He did not tell them to put the money in the bank to draw interest or to trade on the stock market. He simply gave them talents and then he left.

The common practice to protect a large sum of money was to bury it in a safe place in the ground. According to common practice, the third slave did exactly as was customary to do. Bury your large sum of money or talent. The third slave did what was expected of him in the culture.

But in this story the third slave is chastised for burying his talent. He is called worthless and lazy. The one who takes the least risky option is thrown out into utter darkness.

The second observation I bring to our attention this morning is that the master never informed the slaves that he would return. The storyteller says that the master left on a journey, but we do not know if he had any plans to return.

So how did these 3 slaves respond to this situation? The slave given over \$6 million dollars chose to take some financial risks and invest the money that he was given. He could have played it safe. He could have stolen the money. But in this parable this slave takes what he is given and makes something of it.

The second slave does the same. He is given over \$3 million. He also takes this money and takes some financial risks and invests what he has.

But we are told that the third slave is given over \$1 million and he plays it safe. He simply buries what he has been given. When the master returns he celebrates the risks taken by the first two and has some very harsh words to say about the last one who plays it safe. The greatest risk in this parable is to play it safe.

So, what we have here in this parable are two different perceptions of who God is and how God acts. We have two slaves that see God as filled with grace and we have a third slave who sees God as something to fear. And this parable proves that you will see what you expect to see.

The first two slaves see God as a God of abundant grace. They know that God will provide them with everything that they need. They know that God wants them to use what they have been given. They know that God will always provide them with what they need. Because of trusting in God's grace and abundance they are free to take risks.

But the third slave is overcome by fear. The third slave sees God as a God consumed by rules and regulations. Fear restricts us while faith and trust expand what we do and believe.

God in this story is not a helicopter parent. The master goes out on a journey and leaves the slaves to make their own choices. The slaves are given the freedom and autonomy to learn new talents, to live their lives, to invest in their communities, and to take actions toward their future.

So how does this parable reflect us today? Many of us may look to the very rich and powerful among us and lament how they are wasting and abusing their power and prestige today. Today in our culture we are hearing lots and lots of stories of very powerful men who have used their power and influence to sexually intimidate and assault women.

Courageous women are speaking out against politicians and producers. These men are all too common stories of power and talent wasted and abused.

But don't we all live like that third slave at times? Don't we all live under the fear that we don't have enough? We live under the umbrella of scarcity rather than abundance. We fear we do not have enough stuff, so we buy frivolous items. We fear that we do not have enough love in our lives, so we have affairs.

Churches also live like that third slave at times. We worry about the church running out of money rather than how to impact the most lives with the gospel. We worry about church size rather than gospel influence.

But we don't have to be the scared and timid third slave. We can be one of the first two slaves. We can recognize that God has given us abundance and we can trust that God will always provide what we need. We can take risks and not have to always play it safe.

Today is the conclusion of our stewardship theme on "A Time for Thanksgiving." And all of us do indeed have so much to be thankful for. But like that short video we showed portrays we must recognize the blessings in our lives. We are invited today to live as thankful people.

Thankful people are generous people. Thankful people are generous because they believe that there will always be enough. Thankful people believe that God wants us to use what we have to serve and trust that God can make us fruitful.

Today at the conclusion of worship you will be invited to return a pledge card. If you have not already received one, then you will be handed one now. This is not about budgets. It's not about salaries and paying to fix the plumbing.

Your contributions to this church are used in those ways. But making a financial commitment is about being one of those first two slaves who is willing to trust God and being open to how God can use you and your talents and gifts.

As you complete your pledge card today you are invited to ask yourself if you really trust God and God's grace in your life. Do you see God as filled with grace and abundance? Or do you see God as lacking in the ability to provide what you need.

If you trust in the God of grace, then be open to taking some chances with the gifts and talents that you have at your discretion. AMEN.

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-Given: November 19, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)