

Improving Your Serve

Using What God Has Given

Frankton – 5/17/15

Scripture: Matthew 25.14-30 Parable of the Talents

Proposition: Jesus has placed His business into our hands and will return someday to judge our faithfulness.

A man from out east had always dreamed of owning a cattle ranch and had finally saved enough money to buy his dream spread in Wyoming. His best friend flew out to visit and asked, “So, what’s the name of your ranch?” The new rancher told him that he had a really hard time coming up with a name that he liked. He and his wife couldn’t agree on what to call it so they settled on, “The Double-R Lazy-L Triple-Horseshoe Bar-7 Lucky-Diamond Ranch.” His friend was really impressed and then asked, “So where are all the cattle?” To which the new rancher replied, “We had quite a few...but none of them survived the branding!” As we’ve been focusing on some ways that we can [SLIDE] improve our serve, I want to suggest this morning that it’s possible to get so caught up in what we call our spiritual gifts that we might not survive servanthood. The key is not so much to identify what we have but to use what God has given.

Our scripture is from Matthew 25; so let’s set the context. This parable comes in the section of Matthew’s gospel where Jesus is giving an answer to the disciples’ question about his Second Coming. In Matthew 24 Jesus warns them to be on guard so that no one will deceive them and helps them understand that once he leaves, he will come again. He challenges them to be ready because he will come at an hour when he is least expected. At the beginning of chapter 25, Jesus compares his coming to the custom of a bridegroom arriving in the middle of the night. He concludes by telling the apostles to keep watch, because they don’t know the day or the hour. Then Jesus tells them the parable that is today’s scripture.

As we walk through this powerful passage this morning, we’ll see several lessons. The first is: [SLIDE] What we have is not ours. Jesus starts by saying that a wealthy man was getting ready for a long trip and called his servants and entrusted his money to them. It was common for wealthy men to take long journeys. Before they would leave, they would arrange to have someone pick up their mail and feed their pets. But even more than that, they would often delegate the control of their wealth to trustworthy employees. The employees were expected to bring a return on what had been handed over to them. Given the uncertainties of transportation in those days, the time of return for even a well-planned trip was often open-ended. There was no doubt in the minds of these servants that the property and money still belonged to the master. They were the possessors, but not the owners. Their job was to manage what they were given.

Likewise, we must remember that everything we have has been given to us and is not really ours. God has the ownership rights, and we have the managerial responsibility. God is the owner and we are the manager. God is the sovereign; we are the servant. Have you allowed this basic principle into your psyche? You don’t really own anything. Everything belongs to God. Until we recognize this truth, we will not be good managers of what has been entrusted to us. Our days are in his hands. Our gifts and abilities are on loan from him. Our money is an “advance” from the Almighty.

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Our houses, cars, clothes, and every possession we have don't belong to us. We really don't own anything.

Which brings me to the next lesson: [SLIDE] We're given what we can handle. We see that the master gave some bags of silver to three of his servants: one he gave five bags, to another two bags, and to another one bag. Some of you know this story as the "Parable of the Talents." A talent was a measure of weight. It used to indicate a very large sum of money. While scholars differ on the exact amount, most agree that it would take an ordinary laborer almost twenty years to earn just one talent, or one bag of silver. To put this into our economy, using \$12 as an hourly wage, a talent or a bag of silver would be the equivalent of about \$480,000.

The Master gave the first servant five bags, which was about \$2.4 million. The second servant received two bags, or approximately \$960,000. And the third servant got one bag, or \$480,000. Even though there's a big difference between five bags and one bag, the guy who received one bag still got a lot of money. That reminds us that God gives out of His abundance to us!

And here's the kicker, he gave to each man [SLIDE] *in proportion to their abilities*. [15] The responsibility God entrusts you with is tied to your ability that God gives you. This is very interesting. You have what you have because God gave it to you. And he expects you to manage his gifts within the boundaries of ability that he has wired into you. As we learned last week, there are different kinds of gifts, and the Holy Spirit distributes these responsibilities to each one, as God determines. God entrusts different stuff to different people according to his sovereign purposes. In other words, he knows what we can handle. Our job is to be faithful with whatever amount we have to work with. So, we trust that God knows more about us than we even know about ourselves.

Next: [SLIDE] We must invest what we've been given. Verse 16 tells us that the man who received five bags of silver went and put his money to work and gained five more. The guy who got two bags did the same thing. We do know that he worked hard however, because he also doubled his master's money, ending up with four talents. The third servant had a different approach: [SLIDE] *but the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money*. The practice of hiding valuables in the ground was quite common back then. It was one of the safest ways of protecting possessions. Even though we don't read about any specific instructions for what to do with the money, the first two guys went to work and multiplied their investment. The one-talent guy was apparently a slacker who went off and buried his blessing.

Because Antonio's voice was high and squeaky, he did not make the tryouts for the Cremona Boys' Choir. When he took violin lessons, the neighbors persuaded his parents to make him stop. Yet Antonio still wanted to make music. His friends gave him a hard time because his only talent was whittling. When Antonio was older he served as an apprentice to a violinmaker. His knack for whittling grew into a skill of carving and his hobby became his craft. He worked patiently and faithfully. By the time he died, he left over 1,500 violins, each one bearing a label that read, "Antonio Stradivarius." They are the most sought-after violins in the world and can sell for more than \$1,000,000 each. Antonio couldn't sing or play or preach or teach but his responsibility was to use his ability, and his violins are still making beautiful music today.

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Our potential is God's gift to us. What we do with it is our gift to him. Zig Ziglar has said, [SLIDE] "You are the only person on earth who can use your ability." Are you investing what you've been given, regardless of how much it is? Or, have you buried your blessing and kept it hidden from others?

The next lesson is that: [SLIDE] a day of accountability is coming. After a while, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. It was the duty of servants to always bear in mind that the master would be returning and would settle his accounts with them. Not all of us will be audited by the IRS, but we'll all be audited by the God. We'll have to give an account for how we've used what we've been given. Jesus is coming again! Let's be faithful in doing whatever he gives us to do. He's invested something in you, and one day he's coming back to claim it. Your job may be big or small, but whatever it is, do it to the best of your ability and you'll be ready for your audit. Wouldn't it be terrible to be ashamed and unprepared when Jesus comes back?

The last lesson is: [SLIDE] What we do with what we have reveals our view of God. At the accounting with the master, we see that the man who had been given five talents brought five more with him. He's excited to show the master what he had done. He's bubbling with enthusiasm and thoroughly thrilled. He couldn't wait to present what he had done because he wanted to please the owner. The man with the two talents approached this time of reckoning with the same anticipation and excitement. The master is thrilled with both of them because they demonstrated responsibility for their ability.

These two faithful servants received: Affirmation: "Great job! Well done. I appreciate your good work and your faithfulness." Promotion: "Since you've done so well with what I've given you, I'm going to give you even more responsibility and opportunity for growth." Celebration: "You've made me very happy. Let's celebrate together!" They were faithful and were called good because they had a right view of the master. Likewise, when we see God for who He is, we will want to be faithful and we'll focus on doing good things. God is looking for faithful people, for those who will properly manage their resources for kingdom purposes. And, when we're responsible for what we've been given, we'll be given even more responsibilities.

This third servant had a wrong view of the master. He looked at him as someone who was hard and harsh, instead of loving and gracious. A.W. Tozer was right when he said that what we think about God is the most important thing about us. If we view God as a tyrant then we'll filter everything through this lens. Some of you may be secretly angry with God because you think he did something you didn't want him to do, or he didn't do something that you think he should have. As a result, your view of him is skewed. Your preconceived notions prevent you from seeing him as a God of grace, and as a result you refuse to serve him with what he's given you. When we blame God we end up burying our blessings.

The third servant declares that the reason he didn't do anything with what he had been given was because he was afraid. His fear paralyzed him and so he decided to play it safe. He hid the money to make sure it wouldn't be lost. And he accomplished exactly what he set out to achieve: nothing. Like the saying goes, [SLIDE] "If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time." A wrong view of God always leads to fear: "So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground..." A right view of God always leads to faith. If you're struggling with fear today, the best antidote is to further your understanding of the character of God and ask him to grow your faith. Courage is not

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the absence of fear. Courage is moving ahead in spite of your fears. I think the first two guys were probably afraid as well, but because they knew the master's character, instead of being frozen by fear, they stepped out in faith.

Let's look at the differences between the two servants who served and the one who took a dive.

The two were determined to make a profit; the third was determined to not take a loss.

The two were willing take risks; the third took no risks.

The two received the gift; the third refused the gift.

The two wanted to advance the master's domain; the third had no interest in what mattered to the master.

The two viewed the money as an opportunity; the third saw it as a problem.

The two allowed the master's gift to change their lives; the third refused to let the gift touch his life.

The two invested; the third wasted.

The two saw a blessing; the third saw a burden.

The two knew the master; the third had no clue.

A distinguishing mark of a true Christian is service and giving. A lack of service betrays a heart where Jesus doesn't really live. **[SLIDE]** A Christian who is not using what God has given is a contradiction in terms. Don't be a contradiction. Be a Christian.