

## NO FEAR!

22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost -13 November Anno Domini 2011

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Matthew 25:14–30

Jesus said: “It 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. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘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.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For 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. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Fear is one of our greatest foes. It paralyzes us with anxiety and doubt. There’s the fear of failure; the fear of punishment; the fear of criticism, the fear of disapproval and yes, even the fear of success. It can start with a harsh word from a parent; a brash comment from a spouse, a discouraging criticism from a teacher; or a negative review from a hardhearted boss. “Nothing ventured, nothing gained,” goes the saying, and yet working under a cloak of fear, nothing ventured actually seems like a pretty safe bet when dealing with a nasty boss. So it may seem for that cautious servant in our Lord’s parable for today - the parable of talents.

A talent was a unit of money. Let’s put this in perspective. Today’s gold prices are about \$1770 per ounce. Israel used the ancient Babylonian talent weight measure. Therefore a talent was 130 pounds or approximately 3 million, 681 thousand dollars per talent in today’s values. That’s a fair piece of change, isn’t it?

When we use the word “talent” we typically mean ability or aptitude. Like a “musical or artistic talent” and that actually goes back to this parable. When radio personality Rush Limbaugh says that he has “talent on loan from God,” he’s speaking the truth along the lines of this parable. I hope he’s actually read it. The servants each have talents on loan from their master for which there is a coming day of reckoning and reward with the master’s return. We’ll talk about that in a second, but first we need to get a firm grip on the parable itself.

The first thing we notice is that the master doesn’t give the same amount to each servant - one gets five talents, another two, and a third gets one. God doesn’t dole out talent equally. We tend to be fixated on “equality” as something good and desirable. Ever notice how children compare what they get with that of their siblings and starting protesting, “Hey, he got more than me.” Whether it’s the amount of presents for Christmas or the size of the piece of cake for dessert, every kid has this sense of equality. Equality means fair, and fair means just, and just is how God is supposed to work. So in

our worldview, every servant gets the same. Or if by some chance they don't, then we take away from the one who has more and give to the one who has less.

But that's not the way God works, not with this master, who, like it or not, is the God figure in the parable. He doles out his talents unequally. And the old Adam, who tends to behave like a spoiled brat, cries out, "Hey that's not fair! He got more than me." Each servant gets what is appropriate, "according to his ability." He doesn't give them more than they can handle, nor less than they are able to manage. He knows each of his servants and what they're capable of, and He puts into their hands what is right for them. Do we trust that also with what we have? Do we trust that God knows what we can handle, and what we can't, and He places into our hands what is appropriate. It isn't equal, but equality wouldn't do justice to who we are, just as a father doesn't love every child the same but each child according to who he or she is.

Then he goes away. He leaves no set of instructions, no rules on what to do with his talents, no quotas or goals for the servants to reach. He simply hands them a wad of money and says, "Go and do business until I get back" and he leaves.

You might ask, "Is that any way to run a business much less care for your investment?"

Leave at least a few instructions or some goals to shoot for. But the master refuses to micro-manage. He doesn't bother to manage at all. He just turns his servants loose with his money and leaves. Can you handle a God who doesn't micromanage your life, who doesn't tell you what to do and when to do it? Can you even fathom a God who entrusts His treasures into the fumbling hands of men and then disappears with a promise "**Lo, I am with you always until the end of the age**"? Can you bear that kind of freedom that says, "Here's a few million dollars, go do business and have a ball. I'll see you when I get back." Can you imagine a God like that?

So what would you do if you were one of those servants? Go to the racetrack or the casino and gamble with it hoping to strike it big? Invest it in the market? That might be a gamble these days too. Tuck it safely in the bank savings account maybe. Stuff it in a mattress? A lot would depend on what kind of master you had, wouldn't it? If you were confident that he was merciful, kind and forgiving, you might invest in some high risk ventures. If you knew he was a tight bookkeeper, you might be a bit more conservative. If you thought he was like Donald Trump on that TV show "The Apprentice" a few years ago, you might be more cautious, lest you hear those fateful words "You're fired." While the other two servants were out doing business with their master's money, the third servant was working hard digging a hole to hide his talent until the master's return. Both faith and unbelief are busy - one happily doing business, the other fearfully hiding to justify oneself.

Then comes the day of reckoning. Judgment Day, the day the books are open and the truth is told. The first servant who received five talents made five more, a 100% profit, for which he hears a hearty "Well done!" and receives his reward and a share in his master's joy. The second servant, who received two talents made two more. A 100 % profit, for he hears a hearty "Well done!" and receives his reward and a share in his master's joy. And comes the third servant with the "talent on loan from God" which he just dug out of the ground, shiny, untarnished and unused. "**I was afraid, for I knew you to be a hard and ruthless man. You reap where you don't sow, you gather where you don't scatter. You make Donald Trump look like Mr. Rogers. And so I buried your talent in the ground. Here is what is yours.**"

Luther once said, "You have the God you believe." If you believe that God is a harsh judge, who gives everyone what they deserve, that's the God you will have. If you believe that God is merciful and gracious, that He is slow to anger and abounds in love, that He forgives sin and justifies the sinner all for His Son Jesus' sake, well, that's the God you have. The servant gets the master he believes he has. He loses his talent, that he buried out fear, and he himself is cast out of his master's house into the place of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. "You're fired!"

The servant was in, a member of his master's household, but now he is out. Just as the five foolish bridesmaids were in, a part of the wedding party, until in their foolishness they found themselves on the outside of a locked door. It isn't that some are forever in and others are forever out. In Jesus' parables, the ones who are out are first in. They have a place in with wedding, they have a place in the house. Each of these last parable teaches us something about faith and unbelief. In the parable of the bridesmaids, faith is prepared, watchful, ready with enough oil to make it through the night. Unbelief foolishly figures it knows the time and timing of the Lord. In this parable, faith works freely and confidently, without so much as a rule or goal, while unbelief sits frozen in the paralysis of fear, stuffing its talent into mattresses and holes in the ground for safe-keeping.

Jesus came into this world, born of the Virgin, as the true Servant of God, the Son who does His Father's bidding. His talent was not simply "on loan from God" but was His as the Son of God. He came to bring nothing less than the world, the whole cosmic order, back to His Father. Though He was the good and faithful Servant, He became for us, the Suffering Servant, bearing the sins of our faithlessness. He became that faithless servant, cast into outer darkness, taking on Himself the weeping and gnashing of teeth, dealing with the harsh task master of the Law that condemns each of us. When He told this parable, and the two others that go with it, He was going to the world's Judgment Day to be judged on the world's behalf.

Jesus freed us to serve His Father, and our Father, without fear. You have been liberated from the demands and quotas and goals of the Law. ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** You appear before the Father as the good and faithful servant that Jesus is, covered with Him, clothed with Him, baptized into Him. He is your freedom to serve God without fear all the days of your life, to take that talent on loan from God and use it in service, in praise, in joy, whether winning or losing, whether in success or failure, whether for profit or loss.

That goes not only for your various aptitudes and abilities. Your greatest "talent on loan from God" is the very Gospel itself, the good news that God has reconciled the world to Himself in Jesus, that He does not count men's sins against them, that He closed the books on the Law two thousand years ago on a cross. The talent of the Gospel is given to be shared not hoarded, to be broadcast not buried, to be told not held as a secret. You know something that in all likelihood the world does not know - that God is not like Donald Trump busy firing apprentices, but He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. He justifies the ungodly and declares the guilty to be innocent. He forgives, freely, for Jesus' sake. The world doesn't know this. Most people, even religious people, don't know this or believe it. You do. That's your talent on loan from God.

The question in today's parable is whether we will use our talent freely or fearfully, in faith or unfaith, trusting that God is good and gracious and forgiving or fearing that He is harsh and demanding and judgmental. Look to the cross of Jesus, and you will see the God you have, the One who comes to judge the living and the dead, the One who came to be the Servant of all. Look to the cross of Jesus, and there find the confidence, the boldness, the freedom to put that talent to work and enter into the joy of Jesus. Look to the cross and have no fear, for the price was paid in full for you.

In the name of Jesus, Amen

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen!