



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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“The Great Giveaway”

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Matthew 25:14 - 30

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

When I was a kid, I heard this parable, and it was something of a life-changer for me. But you'll be glad to know I left my accordion in the car. I chickened out bringing it in to share my talent. 😊

Maybe you've heard about the thing some churches are doing. I call it “The Great Giveaway.” A church will give *out* \$5,000, \$10,000 or \$30,000 dollars to the folks on Sunday morning, and telling them to go use it for God's glory. They divide it into \$20s, \$50s, and \$100s, some big churches even did \$500s and \$1,000s. Then the people take that money, creatively come up with ideas of how to use the money to help advance God's Kingdom, and report back a month later. When our family was in seminary in KY, this megachurch we visited did this same thing. It was cool to hear the stories: some kids used their \$\$ to buy baking ingredients and raise money for missions. Some bought presents for needy folks. One bought billboard time for the church. You could use the \$\$ for lessons. One youth bought a shovel and served his neighbors by shoveling their driveways. You could use it to buy Bibles. Some of the \$\$ helped build a well in Africa. What a cool idea! I was tempted to do that this Sunday because it's such a great illustration of Jesus' Parable of the Talents. You know the story: A Master (who represents God) goes on a journey, leaves his property to 3 of his servants. He gives one servant 5 talents, one 2, and one 1. And He comes back. And 2 of the servants invested their talents earning more talents, but 1 hid his 1 in the ground, and gets in big trouble, “so you better use your talents for God.” Let's look at it more closely. It's found in Matthew 25:14.

Matthew 25:14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

- *“The man entrusted his property to them.”* This has big implications already. The man represents God, and the servants represent God's people. God is the owner of all His stuff and ours. If God is God of the universe, in our best selves, do we really believe our “stuff” is only ours? Even our God-given abilities are His.
- **You have talents? They were given you by the God of talents.** Do you have time? Do you have wealth, influence, power? Do you have powers of speech? Powers of thought? Are you a poet, a problem-solver, or a philosopher? *Whatever* your position is, *whatever* your gifts are, remember that they aren't yours. They are loaned to you from on high. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights”* James 1:17. Even the air we're sharing isn't ours. Our bodies, our minds, our dreams, our time, our talents aren't ours. The truth is, **no one has anything of their own, except their sins.** That is the only thing you can say truly belongs solely to you... (The sad thing is how much we cling to them!)
- How could I live my life thinking I'm anything *but* a steward or a manager of my life? My family? My responsibilities? My stuff? It's not mine. They're not mine. They're on loan from God Himself. (Do you see how unhealthy it is to become too attached?)
- Now, are we talking about talents? Our abilities or something we're good at? Yes and no. The talent in the first century was money. It was the largest unit of silver money, shaped in pellets or rings, worth about one ox. That's no small amount! And God wants us to be responsible for them.

- **One got 5 talents, the others 2 and 1.** Interesting. Jesus says people will come with more or less talents, more or less responsibility, and that God's given it that way. (That's crazy!) That smacks in the face of what we *want* to think. Aren't we all equal? Yes of course. But we're not all the same. Jesus did not say "The one with 5 talents is the boss of the others." He just said one had 5, one had 2, and the other had 1.
- This truth about differences in people is sort of obvious, but no one likes to talk about it. Yet, if we would realize this truth, a lot of confusion could be cleared up. We speak as though God made no differences in us at all. One guy finds himself successful and thinks everyone else must be lazy. And you hear ugly remarks against people who don't stand out, that they don't make any difference in the world.

16 *The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.*

- Jesus says 2 of the 3 worked with what they were given.
- I don't think it had to be the servant with 1 talent that buried it. It could have just as easily been the servant with 5 talents who buried his 5.

19 *"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'* 21 *"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

- (Here's another "Oh, *that's* where that 'Well done, good and faithful servant' is found!" Yes, the parable of the talents.")
- There's an even bigger key in this verse that helps us understand how God works. If you get this you will have a much better grasp of how you will experience God, and grow in your relationship with Him. It's when the Master says: "*You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.*"
- When we realize how loved we are by God, so many of us want to serve God in a big way, but we're not willing to put aside our agendas. We're not willing to give up a football game or a shopping trip, if God's ideas interfere with our plans. We're not willing to take on some grunt work or a small assignment for God first. Jesus is saying here that's how God works. If you and I can't be faithful in a little, God won't give us the larger assignment. He's building our character. God spoke to Abram that a child would be born. How long till it happened? 25 years! Because it took 25 years to make a father suitable for Isaac. God was concerned about a nation. The quality of the father will affect the quality of the generations that follow.
- You and I need to give God all the time He needs to make us the kind of person that He could trust for a larger assignment. There are a bunch of people God wants to reach through you. For their sake, give yourself to the talents and tasks God gives you, so you can learn to love Him. Then he can "*Put your in charge of many things*" and God can achieve everything He wants in the lives of those you touch.

22-*The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'*

- In the past, when I've read this, I always looked at the guy with 5 talents. I overlooked the guy with 2 talents. But I've realized that the 2 talents is more likely where most of us are. Notice however that the one given 2 talents is equally responsible as the servant given 5 talents.
- Often times, God works even more effectively through those who have less talents, because everyone can see that it is through God's strength and not the strength of the servant at work. Scripture says "In our weakness, He is strong."

23 *"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

- Wait a minute. Isn't that the exact same thing he said to the servant with 5? Yes. Verbatim.
- But here's the thing: For many of us 2 talent folks, even these few talents we have must be brought to account. But catch this: The Master's reward is exactly the same! If our few talents are rightly used, there is no condemnation for not having more talents!

24 *"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man,*

harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

28 "Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

- Okay, that's harsh. That's freaky. The 1 talent guy didn't murder anybody. He simply didn't take responsibility. But Jesus says we have no idea how serious that is. We have no idea how serious it is when we don't use our resources or take our responsibility for Him. We have no idea the seriousness of using our gifts selfishly because we have no idea how God is planning to use us. Are you using the gifts God's given you?
- **Another thing: even a few talents must be accounted for.** We're not off the hook, just because we didn't put ourselves or our talents "out there." Hiding your talent, or making yourself insignificant won't excuse you in this.
- Here's something too: It's personal! Jesus says it a lot: there will be a "*settling of accounts.*" In the day of judgment your account is personal; **God will not ask you what your church did—he will ask you what you did yourself.**

I'd love to hang a sign above our door: "TALENTS FULLY ENGAGED": Like Jeff, the psychologist-turned financial planner helping run Financial Peace University helping take stress out of people's lives and improving their marriages as well. Andy Mellifont helping people make connections at our church so folks can feel comfortable enough to begin to engage. Linda Vander Haagen providing help as a spiritual director. Cheryl Vogel and Pat Wilkins taking their passion to help 3rd world farmers and bringing others along through Fair Trade Coffee. Tom & Beth Snyder building houses & lives. The fact is, God is telling an amazing story around here, and the reason Jesus tells this parable is because He's inviting *you* to engage. Right here, right now. Don't just watch *others* engage. Have something to *do* with it. We're accountable for our talents—1, 2, or 5 of them. There's a place in God's heart only you can fill. There's a place in God's plan only you and your talents can fill.

Y'know, I think we're pretty serious about wanting to impact our surrounding communities. But until we fully engage, it won't happen. In the U.S., Christians give on average 3—4% of their income to the church). And we want God to impact the world through that. Besides Leigh and me, I don't know what any of us gives. But based on our giving, I think we're close to that. Now imagine what God could do if we fully engaged. If we even moved from 3% to 6%! Imagine how many more lives could be intercepted, and passions engaged with just that, let alone the full tithe...

I was going to do "The Great Giveaway" this morning. But you know what?

God's already done it. The talents are already dispersed.

Do you see it?

I don't think this congregation needs any gimmick before we illustrate it.

God's already given you a free gift, no strings attached, it would seem.

Some of you have been given the whole \$30,000. Some less, some a whole lot more.

And God's given you talents. And God's given you creativity to use that money.

God's given you a mind, and ideas on how to use your talents.

Are you good at motivating others to exercise for their health?

Do you have an ability to get people's attention by how you can design a room?

Are you an athlete that inspires people?

Are you good at telling jokes that bring joy to life?

Are you gifted with your hands to bring healing?

Can you speak well?

Are you a good listener?

Do you do windows?

Can you cook?

Can you organize things and people?

Can you throw a great party?

Do you see ways to help educate people about important things?

How about let's get started, and work our tails off for the Master, until He returns.

Imagine the people of Dexter, Chelsea, Ann Arbor, Whitmore Lake, Pinckney, & Hamburg being served by good and faithful servants of God? May it be so!

STUDY GUIDE

Matthew 26, 27, 28—The Passion. Mark 1, 2

A STUDY TIP—Think of this daily study time not so much as building your information, but for building your relationship with God.

Monday: Read Matthew 26—A lot happens here: The Plot, Anointing, & Judas (1-16). The woman gave lavishly to Jesus, while Judas wanted to see what he could get from him. In what ways are you like the woman? Like Judas? The Last Supper (17-35). What does Communion mean to you? How do you respond to God's forgiveness? The Garden of Gethsemane (36-46). What has been "the longest night of your life? In your life, when have you wrestled with God? What was the real issue? Jesus Arrested, Tried, and Disowned (47-75). Jesus knows what it's like to be treated unfairly. When do you keep silent? When do you talk about your faith?

Tuesday: Read Matthew 27—Judas Hangs Himself (1-10). Both Peter and Judas caved under pressure. Had Judas waited 3 days, things would have been *so* different. What do you need to under-react on for now? Wait on? Jesus Before Pilate (11-26). Talk about peer pressure! When have you gotten caught up with the crowd? Pilate "washed his hands" of Jesus. How difficult for you is it to accept responsibility? The Crucifixion & Death (27-56). How does reading Jesus' agony deepen your love for him? How would you explain the necessity of his death to a skeptic? The Tomb (57-66). How have you tried to "guard" against Jesus breaking through to your life? Why? What happened?

Wednesday: Read Matthew 28—The Central Teaching of the New Testament is the Resurrection. It is the central tenet of every sermon preached or written in the New Testament. Note there are 4 accounts of the resurrection, like 4 versions of eyewitnesses at the scene of an event. They appear slightly different. How does the fact that they were never forced into alignment authenticate the resurrection? How did the reality of Jesus' resurrection "dawn" on **Wednesday Continued:** you? Were you more of a quick believer, or a slow doubter? Why? The Resurrection! (1-10). Notice an angel rolls away the stone not to release the resurrected Lord, but to permit the disciples to see the place where the body lay. The Cover Up (11-15). Interesting how the explanations began immediately. The Great Commission (16-20). In the Greek language, the emphasis is on "Make disciples," as you go, as you teach, as you baptize. Our church seeks to "make disciplers." Who do you see God bringing into your life, who may be seeking God's Truth, Hope, and Love? How has the Book of Matthew changed your views of Jesus as Messiah? The kingdom of God? Jesus' ministry? Your ministry?

Mark—The Gospel of Christ in Action. While Matthew wrote for a more Jewish audience, Mark's picture of Jesus is shaped for the Roman mind. Mark is the earliest of the 4 Gospels, typically dated 50s A.D. Mark's author was likely John Mark, who translated for Peter on his way to Rome. Picture it from Peter's perspective. Mark uses "And immediately" throughout to move the reader forward.

Thursday: Read Mark 1—Introduction (1-13). Unlike the other gospels, Mark begins with Jesus' public ministry. John the Baptist prepares the way, Jesus is baptized, and tempted, all in 13 verses! Jesus Acts with Authority, Calling His First Disciples and Healing Many (14-45). Mark is identifying Jesus right away. On a scale of 1-10, how much authority does Jesus have in your life? What would he have to cast out or heal to rate a 10? What would it mean for Jesus to "touch" you? Where do you need a special touch this week? Stop right now and pray for His touch in your life.

Friday: Read Mark 2—Jesus Heals a Paralytic (1-12). In what ways is sin like paralysis? Are you more like the paralytic, his friends, or the teachers? Jesus Calls Levi (13-17). How "sick" were you before you saw your need for a spiritual doctor? Jesus Begins to Teach (18-28). How has Jesus "burst" some of your old thinking?