

Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴“You see, the kingdom of heaven is like a man going on a journey. He called his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to still another one talent, each according to his own ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The servant who had received the five talents immediately put them to work and gained five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the servant who had received the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸But the servant who had received one talent went away, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹“After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The servant who received the five talents came and brought five more talents. He said, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’

²¹“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’

²²“The servant who received the two talents came and said, ‘Master, you entrusted me with two talents. See, I have gained two more talents.’

²³“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’

²⁴“Then the servant who received one talent came and said, ‘Master, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter seed. ²⁵Since I was afraid, I went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’

²⁶“His master answered him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter seed? ²⁷Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers so that when I came I would get my money back with interest. ²⁸Take the talent away from him and give it to the servant who has the ten talents. ²⁹Because everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ³⁰Throw that worthless servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

What Really Matters Is Knowing the Master

I.

He had been discovered and arrested as a spy. The time had been set for him to be hanged on a British gallows. The date was September 22, 1776. That was when Captain Nathan Hale famously stated: “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.”

Is it possible that you would have a similar feeling, and be able to make a similar statement as a believer in Jesus? “I only regret that I have but one life to live for God!”

Jesus tells a parable in today’s Gospel reading. The term “talent” is central to the story. Did you know that the English word “talent” is derived from the Greek word talent used in our gospel and elsewhere in the Bible? Today the word talent refers to an ability that a person has. That meaning comes directly from Jesus’ parable about the master entrusting his servants with talents. Their abilities in making use of his money were central to Jesus’ story. That is how the English word came to mean abilities.

If you happened to be reading the Gospel lesson in your EHV pew Bible, you saw a footnote explaining the word “talent.” The footnote states: “Each talent was worth six

thousand denarii. A denarius was one day's wage." Wages vary a bit in our society, but many employees working 8-hour days make about \$100 per day. At that pay rate, a talent would amount to \$600,000. That means the servants were entrusted various amounts of money ranging between \$600,000 and \$3 million.

II.

The story Jesus told obviously turns on the big difference between the two faithful servants and the one unfaithful servant. What was it that really made such a difference in the way they acted? Jesus' parable doesn't even suggest that the wicked servant was put off by the fact that the other two servants received more money from the master—all three got a lot.

Note carefully what the story says about the talents of money. The master *entrusted* them to his servants. If we are going to let the Word of God have its way with us we have to do some accounting. What gifts has God given to us? Your house is God's. Your phone is God's. Your car is God's. Your kids are God's. Your abilities are God's. Your financial assets are God's. If you can be the least bit kind and helpful to others, that gift came from God. If you can be compassionate when people are hurting, that gift came from God. The God who has given you all you have wants to know: are you using all of it—every bit of it—to honor him?

If you are not, there's hell to pay. It's not just churches that get serious about stewardship when the leaves start falling. The Lord is *always* serious about how we manage what he entrusts to us. Seven times in the New Testament Jesus repeated that hell is a place of eternal darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth for those who rebel and turn away from God.

The wicked servant's rebellion was not dealing opioids that people overdose on. It was not murder, or an addiction to porn or booze. Do you know what his rebellion was? Doing nothing—not using God's gifts for God's glory. His rebellion was, essentially, "Leave me alone so I can do what I want!"

If you have a nice place to live, a nice car to drive, and maybe even a nice TV to watch, that's not wrong or sinful at all. Those are gifts from God. Thank God for them. Take good care of what God has given you. But also take inventory of every good thing he has given you and figure out the answer to this question: How much of what God has given you have you buried in the ground of self-advancement or self-enjoyment rather than directing every gift you've been given toward the glory of God and the good of others? The First Commandment that requires perfect love for God buries us in guilt that goes way over our heads.

III.

Here's the thing about the two faithful servants—neither one was perfect. They were sinners, too. Their story really started long before their master went on a journey and entrusted them with these talents of money. There was something already firmly in place—something that had been created inside them—so that when they were given that money and the master traveled abroad, the first and only thing they could think of to do was to devote themselves to activities and projects that would be pleasing to him when he returned. What do you think that something was?

In the news we see all kinds of disasters involving loss of life. Often there will be a close friend or family member who is obviously grieving trying to talk on camera about how much they loved the person who died and how much that loved one will be missed. When those tightest of family ties are severed by death, there's the worst kind of heartache. But that

example doesn't hold a candle to the tightest of ties there has ever been—the eternal bond of love between God the Father and God the Son. *That* love is stronger than the fiercest of thunderstorms; stronger than a tornado, or even a category 5 hurricane. That love can't be described by words.

When it came to the matter of having someone pay for your sins, there were only two ways it could go: either it would be you going to a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, or it would be a pure and perfect substitute who would go to the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth *for* you.

Before you were born and before he created all things God the Father had already made that choice. On Good Friday he acted on that choice. The thick, unbreakable cords of perfect and eternal love that bound the Father to the Son were severed. God the Father sliced through them, and dropped his beloved, only-begotten Son into the torturous darkness of God forsaken-ness. Even in that hell of hells, with the guilt of everyone counted against *him*, Jesus did not gnash his teeth in anger against God. In silent suffering he was damned, and he died for you. Your Father in heaven kept *you*...and cursed his Son.

IV.

That's the "something" those two faithful servants had seen in their master—how deep his love for *them* was. That's what they knew about him before he so generously entrusted his property to them—they knew how much he loved them. That's what drove them to devote themselves so completely to working for him while he was gone. Of all the things they could ever have had for themselves, hearing "Well done!" from him was better than anything.

The master's great love was also what the wicked servant dismissed as irrelevant and meaningless. Tragically, *he* thought he had bigger fish to fry than why God put him on earth and why God gave him what he gave him.

In the vast array of gifts God gives, he has distributed them in various kinds and in various amounts to each one of you, because he knows just what *you* need to serve him well. The only key that will ever turn over the engine to take you down the road of devoting yourself to serving him with those gifts is how much Jesus loves you.

In this all-encompassing arena of making faithful use of God's gifts, what really matters is knowing the Master. Love is what's in his heart for you. Let it be love in *your* heart for him.

You don't need to say that you only regret that you have been given one life to live for your Savior. After all, that "one life" is an eternal life. You will be living with your Savior forever, now on earth, and forever in heaven. Let's get after that life! Amen.