

"Using What God Has Given Us"

Luke 19:11-27; Matthew 25: 14-30

Introduction:

You hear it again and again in sports, business and education, "he had so much potential".

All of us know of an Ohio State player who helped our team make it to the National Championship and developed a wrong attitude towards the University and its coaches.

He wanted to go to the NFL early, and sued them for an early entry, which I remind you he lost the lawsuit.

He finally was drafted into the NFL but didn't make it on the team because they said he was not in shape.

Two weeks ago he made the news again, I got so tired of reading about this one football player, but this time he was arrested for robbery.

"He had so much potential" and even Jim Tressell said he had hoped Maruice would make a come back into college football.

It is a phrase usually spoken about someone who failed to do what was expected or what others perceived was possible.

The words may be applied to the highly touted college star,

- the gifted (but lazy) student;
- the talented but recklessly indulgent actor;
- or the savvy businessperson with no people skills.
- It is the story of "what might have been".

The parable we look at this morning is about wasted potential

But also about neglected responsibility.

In this parable and the parable in Matthew 25 the master leaves his servants with money to invest.

When he returns some of the servants are proved to be faithful, others are proved to be lazy.

Notice why the parable was told, ***“because some people thought the Kingdom of God was going to appear at once.”***

The people were moving toward Jerusalem and the great Triumphal Entry.

You could sense the excitement building.

The people (surely even the disciples) believed that this was the “moment of truth” this was the time when Jesus was going to be proclaimed Messiah and the power of God would overthrow the Jews.

The parable is pretty simple.

A certain man had as his inheritance the rights of kingship (sounds like Jesus, doesn't it?).

He had to go to another country to claim his position.

Some people did not want him to be king.

They hated him and resisted him.

Before the man left to claim his inheritance he entrusted his servants with funds to invest (a fairly common practice of the day, I understand).

One day the King returned.

He brought in his servants and asked what return they earned from his investment.

After rewarding those who were faithful and rebuking those who were not, the King took care of those who hated him.

It is true that this story has strong analogies to an event in the life of Herod.

But Jesus wasn't making a point about Herod . . . He was making a point about Himself.

Let me point you to **several lessons** from this text,

I. GOD HAS GIVEN US A RESPONSIBILITY

When you compare the two parables it seems that God wants us to do at least two things.

First, we are called to share the gospel.

In Luke every one of the ten servants was given the same thing.

It was equal and they were to invest that amount for the Lord's purpose.

I think this parable reminds us that every believer is given God's Spirit and the message of eternal life.

Our job is to seek to bring a good return from that message by our faithful proclamation.

We are Christ's ambassadors . . . we are charged to point the lost to Christ.

Of course we can do this in many ways,

- By our personal explanation of the gospel to our friends and relatives
- By giving Christian literature (tracts, books, sermons etc.) to others
- By investing in evangelistic efforts (radio, television, prison ministry)
- We can do it through newspaper ads, letters of the editor and articles

- We can do it through the Internet (web pages, discussion groups, e-mail)
- We can do this through our acts of kindness and mercy

God has entrusted us with the treasure of the gospel.

We can bury that treasure or we can invest it at every opportunity.

The second thing we are asked to do is to use our gifts for God's glory.

This seems to be the lesson from the parable of the talents in Matthew 25.

In that story, each servant was given differing amounts, ***“in accordance with their ability”***.

God has equipped each one of us with gifts that we are to use for His glory.

Every time I relay this message there are people who tell me that they think God skipped over them when he was giving out gifts.

We seem to think that the only gifts God gives are gifts of music, public speaking, or teaching.

Those are just a small measure of what God gives to people.

God gives many gifts,

- It may be our finances (the ability to help others and make things happen)
- It may be a particular talent
- It may be insightful ideas (you can lead with great clarity and insight)
- It may be an ability to organize (you are a detail person)
- It may be a great vision (you see possibilities others never thought of)
- It may be a caring heart (you are tuned in to those around you)

- It may be the ability to give wise counsel to those who need guidance
- It may be the ability to mediate between warring parties
- It may be the ability to build or fix things (you can help people in very tangible ways)
- It may be an athletic ability (and consequently you are given a platform from which to minister to those around you)
- It may be a rapport with children (you may have gifts in youth work)

There are many gifts that God has given us.

Our job is real simple.

First, we are to find what gifts and abilities we have been given (seek God in prayer, talk to your friends, experiment).

I'm going to bet that you already know what you are good at doing.

You just never thought of those things as tools for ministry.

And that's the second thing; we are to take the gifts God has given and find a way to use them to bring glory and honor to the Father.

Let me give you two examples,

Henry P. Crowell, affectionately called "The autocrat of the Breakfast Table," contracted tuberculosis when a boy and couldn't go to school.

After hearing a sermon by Dwight L. Moody, young Crowell prayed, "I can't be a preacher, but I can be a good businessman. God, if you will let me make money, I will use it in your service."

Under the doctor's advice Crowell worked outdoors for seven years and regained his health.

He then bought the little run-down Quaker Mill at Ravanna, Ohio.

Within ten years Quaker Oats was a house-hold word to millions.

Crowell also operated the huge Perfection Stove Company.
For over forty years Henry P. Crowell faithfully gave 60 to 70 percent of his income to God's causes, having advanced from an initial 10%. [Tan. 7700 illustrations]

Let's look at an illustration that may be a little more realistic for us.

Suppose you have a gift and a knack for cooking.

You're a good cook.

You know it and so do others.

How do you use that gift for God's glory?

- Invite your non-Christian friends over for dinner
- Bring meals to those who have just returned from the hospital, are grieving, or are just going through a rough time.
- Make something as a gift to share with people who visit our church (as a way of saying "thanks for visiting with us").
- Share a favorite dish with a neighbor as a way of demonstrating love
- Help with church meals
- Make a dessert for someone who works faithfully in the shadows to let them know their efforts are appreciated.

It doesn't matter where your gifts are . . . they can be invested in the growth of God's kingdom.

II. GOD HAS GIVEN US A PROMISE

Both parables tell us the same message: the person who serves faithfully will be rewarded.

In the parable in Luke parable the King rewards his servants proportionately (the one who gained a tenfold return gained 10 cities, the man who gained a fivefold reward gained five cities).

In the parable in Matthew those who are faithful seem to be granted similar rewards.

Both are complimented, given greater responsibility and invited to share in the Master's happiness.

I have no idea why the parable in Luke talks about ten servants and then only tells us about three!

I also don't know what to make of the different rewards.

Maybe we aren't to make anything out of the specific rewards given.

Suffice it to say that faithfulness will be rewarded in some fashion.

What I do see **are two principles that are highlighted.**

The first is this: "those who are trustworthy in little things will be given more" (19:17; Matthew 25:21).

You will never be used greatly by God until you are faithful in what he has given you to do now.

There are **two simple reasons** for this principle of life.

First, in the little things of life we show whether or not we can handle the big things.

If you don't put the Lord first in your present finances, you won't put Him first when you have more.

If you don't fulfill your present commitments, there is no reason to believe you will fulfill greater commitments.

If you can't handle the influence you presently have, you will not receive more.

The way you handle the little things shows your character.

Second, the little things of life often turn into the big things.

The message of the gospel you share with another might lead to the next Billy Graham.

The act of kindness you extend may open the door of eternal life to your neighbor.

The young person you help lead to Christ may head some great corporation some day.

If we serve God moment by moment in whatever circumstance we find ourselves we will be astonished at what God will do through us.

There is a second principle or promise in these parables “everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.” (Luke 19:26; see Matthew 25:29).

This isn't as difficult as it seems.

Eugene Peterson captures the essence of the passage in his paraphrase called THE MESSAGE,

“Then he said to those standing there, ‘Take the money from him and give it to the servant who doubled my stake.’

“They said, ‘But Master, he already has double ...’

“He said, ‘That’s what I mean: Risk your life and get more than you ever dreamed of. Play it safe and end up holding the bag.’

The New Living Translation renders it,

“ ‘Yes,’ the king replied, ‘but to those who use well what they are given, even more will be given. But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away.’”

Isn't this the way it is in all of life?

- The salesman who works hard will be given more territory to make more sales

- The student who is diligent will continue to excel at learning while the lazy student will eventually find that they are unable to keep up.
- The athlete who continues to work hard on the fundamentals will remain sharp and at the top of their game, while the athlete who feels “good enough” will cease to be effective.
- Those who train their bodies will work more efficiently and be more fit and stronger while those who neglect their bodies will lose their energy and be unfit.
- Those who keep working at their spiritual life will discover more of God’s goodness and grace; those who become lazy in spiritual pursuits will slowly drift from the Lord.

There is no such thing as standing still in the Christian life . . . you are progressing or regressing.

The person who is growing will be given increasing opportunity, blessing and responsibility.

The person who is coasting will find joy decreasing, effectiveness diminishing, and compromise increasing. . . they will lose ground.

If you think you are standing still. . . You aren’t!

You are like a person going up the Mississippi in a boat.

When you get tired you feel you can stop paddling and carry on when you feel more rested.

But if you delay long enough you will soon find that you are back where you started.

You may have been idle but the current will have taken you backward.

You are either moving forward in faith or backward in your spiritual life . . . which is the case in your life?

III. GOD HAS GIVEN US A WARNING

There are really two warnings in these parables.

The first is a warning to those who do nothing with the grace and resources that God has given.

They will lose what they have been given.

In 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 we read these words,

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

From this passage it would seem that a person who does not make use of what God has given will not lose their salvation (which is ours as a gift and not works) but they will lose their reward.

That may not seem like a big deal now . . . but I think it will be on that final day.

Every one of us would like to think that our parents were proud of us and approved of the way we lived our lives.

Some people ache for this illusive approval. Imagine how much more we will yearn for the "Well Done!" of Jesus.

There is also a second warning.

In 1 Peter, the apostle writes to those faithful Christians who are being persecuted.

He tells them that the persecution is part of God's pruning of the church.

And then he says these words, ***“For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”*** [1 Peter 4:17].

These are sober words.

Christians will be judged but those who resist the Lord are warned that their punishment will be swift and severe.

For the time being, people can rebel against the King but that will not be tolerated forever.

This raises two important issues.

First, if you are on the outside looking in, realize the perilous nature of your situation.

You presume that you have gotten away with something . . . you haven't.

If you persist in your rebellion against the Lord there will come a day when you will discover how foolish a choice that has been.

Second, if those outside of Christ are going to be judged severely, how can we remain silent?

Honestly, how can we say we care about someone if we are unwilling to urge them to turn from the wrath that is to come?

We either don't believe what the Bible teaches or we don't really care about those we profess to love.

Conclusions: LIFE LESSONS

There are several things we must see.

First, we are reminded that serving the Lord is not easy.

There will be opposition.

The servants in Luke certainly were not popular with those who hated the King.

When we stand with Jesus we will become a target to some.

Second, we should see from this passage that fear is no excuse for a lack of results in our Christian life.

Both of the men who did nothing with what they were given tried to excuse themselves by the fear they felt toward the Master.

But these excuses were unacceptable.

God has told us to abandon our fear and trust Him.

That sounds easy but many times we are paralyzed by fear.

- We are afraid of failure.
 1. But we must be redefine failure.
 2. Who is the true failure?
 3. The person who tries and is unsuccessful or the person who never even tries something new?
 4. Being unsuccessful and being a failure are two different things.
 5. A superstar baseball player makes an out 70% of the time (80% if you're a Cub).
 6. A successful manager may be a person who makes the right decisions 51% percent of the time.
 7. You cannot succeed if you do not try.
- We may be afraid someone will ask a question we can't answer.
 1. But there are lots of questions in every field we can't answer but that doesn't stop us from talking.
- We may be afraid we will offend someone.
 1. No matter what you do in life you are going to offend someone.
 2. The question is whose wrath are you more concerned about, your neighbor's or God's?
- We may be afraid that people won't like us.

1. But if you have to stop being who God has called you to be in order to be liked . . . do these people really like *you* or do they like a pretend you?

Third, the best investment we can make with our life is to use what God has given us to bring honor and glory to the Father.

This approach will lead us away from many of the dangers of life; it will enable us to share in the blessings of God, and it will lead us to the indescribable joy of hearing the Father's "**Well Done**".

Years ago a young man began a small cheese business in Chicago.

He failed.

He was deeply in debt.

"You didn't take God into your business.

You have not worked with Him," said a Christian friend to him.

Then the young man thought, "If God wants to run the cheese business, He can do it, and I'll work for Him and with Him!"

From that moment, God became the senior partner in his business.

The business grew and prospered and became the largest cheese concern in the world!

You ask the name of that young man? J. L. Kraft who became president of the Kraft Cheese Company! [Tan 7700 Illustrations]

God may not be calling you to be the head of some multi-million dollar corporation (but if he is, don't forget to tithe to your home church!).

He is asking you to take the resources he has given you, whatever they are, and use them for His glory.

He is calling you to make the most of every moment, and to take captive every opportunity.

He is calling us to be Christians who are focused, committed, and consistent.

In short, He is calling to live up to our potential.

