**Faithful Over a Little – Sermon Notes**

Matthew 25:14-30

After spending a month considering the mission God has placed us on, we’re taking a few weeks to look at the main way that mission to make disciples is accomplished – evangelism – the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. Specifically, we’re trying to understand how evangelism and God’s sovereignty relate. Last week, Jason looked at it from God’s point of view, showing us how evangelism makes the most sense in the context of a God who is over everything and in control of everything. Because the reality is that people are spiritually dead outside of Christ – not just corpses, but dried bones. They’re harder to save than we tend to think. That means something powerful is needed, something more than an airtight argument or a poignant tweet. It takes the breath, the word, of God to bring dead bones to life. That word is the gospel message, aided by the Spirit. Which means that evangelism is actually easier than we ever thought possible because it’s not dependent on us. It’s God that does the saving; we’re simply the ones told to go and speak to dry bones. Since all this is the case, what is asked of us when it comes to evangelism? That’s what I’d like for us to consider today. So as we turn to walk through today’s text together, would you pray with me?

**We’re all entrusted with something**

Let’s get some context before we start. The parable of the talents, as this story is commonly known, comes near the end of a discussion Jesus has with his disciples about the Day of the Lord; the end. They had asked Jesus, “What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” After telling them some signs to look for, Jesus makes an astonishing statement, “No one knows that day or hour, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only… (Matthew 24:36).” Why is it astonishing? It demonstrates to us the humanity of Jesus.

Now, since his return is unknown, Jesus tells several parables meant to illustrate what ought to characterize His people as they wait for His coming. This parable is one of those. We see in those parables that his return is going to be unexpected, like a thief in the night, so his followers need to watch carefully, act faithfully, and be prepared. Understand as well that, according to Matthew’s account, three days later, Jesus would go to the cross. So now that we’re oriented, let’s take a look at this story Jesus tells.

**Read Matthew 25:14-15**. Since this is parable, it is important that we remember this is a story about concrete things meant to express spiritual truth. A general rule when reading parables – find out how many main characters there are and that indicates about how many points the parable is making. So who is the man in the story? The man who is going away is Jesus and before he leaves, he calls his servants (that would be Jesus' followers) with the intent to deliver over to them his property, and he does so in the form of talents. So what in the world is a talent? The word here in the text is a monetary unit, the biggest unit of money someone in the ancient world could wrap his head around. It would be similar to our word “million.” But it was originally a unit of weight - like we would weigh gold.

Now, to what spiritual reality is the parable pointing with this word? Most of us would make the quick comparison between this talent (which is about money) and the talents (or special abilities) we have. Yes, that would be a good interpretation and application of this text, but I don't think that goes far enough. Jesus gathers his servants to entrust to them his *property* - not just skills and abilities but his money, a little of everything he owns, the resources that belong to him. And what belongs to Jesus? Everything. Everything belongs to him. (John 1 - All things were made though him, and without him was not anything made that was made. Colossians 1 - For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him)

As God, all money belongs to him, all of creation belongs to him, it's all his. And he, in his goodness *entrusts* some of that to us. So yes, as we learn in Scripture, when Jesus saves us, the Holy Spirit enables some of our natural gifts and talents, even giving us other skills and gifts we may not have had before, but here Jesus is giving more than that. He's giving of his resources: He's entrusting some of His money. Have you ever considered that? The money you earn isn't really yours, it belongs to God and he gives it to you as a trust. It really belongs to him. As King and Creator it is his. He entrusts to us time. He allots to each of us a certain number of hours, days, weeks, months, and years. It's a gift granted to us. He's entrusted knowledge and skills and property. It all belongs to him, but he's entrusted some of it to us.

Right here is plenty of stuff to chew on and apply. If we were to stop here and reflect on what it means that everything we have is something God has given to us in trust, it would change how we look at our stuff, our finances, our time, all of it. But that's not all we're entrusted with.

When I read through this passage recently, immediately Paul’s words in 2 Timothy came to mind. 2 Timothy 1:14 - “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” Later, in 2:2 Paul writes, “…what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” What is that good deposit? It is the gospel message, something of infinite worth. What would Timothy have heard Paul teach? The only thing Paul had resolved to know – Christ and him crucified; the gospel message. And we're *entrusted* with the message, the very power of God. Do you know that there are only two things in Scripture called the power of God? One is Jesus himself, and the other is the gospel. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." We're all entrusted with something, with time, w/money, and w/the gospel message.

Now, some of us are entrusted with more; the text says each is entrusted with talents according to their ability. And that's ok - some of us can handle more. But everyone is entrusted with something and generously entrusted. I mean, even the one who got one talent was getting 1 million dollars. Even if we were "only" entrusted with the gospel, that is a treasure of greatest worth. And so, like I imagine the servants did, we have to ask, "ok, you've entrusted us with this; now what?"

**We’re all judged by our faithfulness**

Let’s head back into the story. **Read Matthew 25:16-23**. The servants answered, "Now what?" in two different ways. Two servants went out and invested their talents, receiving a return. One dug a hole and hid the talent. After a long time, the master returns and settles accounts. How good must have that sounded to the early Christians! "after a long time." As they waited for years and years, how good is it to know that they hadn't missed Jesus! So he returns and settles up.

Now, did you hear how similar the first and second servant are treated in this story? The master’s words are exactly the same for both servants. "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." The reward is the same, regardless of the amount brought back. Listen, this is significant. The parallel structure is meant to demonstrate that the amount the servants return isn’t important; what matters is their faithfulness in stewarding their master’s talents well. How amazing is that? You know, it could have gone something like, "The first slave brought back 10 and the master said, "Wonderful, you did very good! Now enter into your master's joy. The second slave brought back 4 and the master said, "Now come on, that's all? You could have done a little better than that. Tell you what, come on in but you'll have to work extra hard."

The simple fact that *faithfulness* is the metric used means freedom for those of us who are Jesus' servants. Worrying about whether we've earned enough return - 5%? 10%? 100% 500%? would paralyze most of us, turning us into legalists. But instead we see that faithfulness with stewarding God's resources is what matters - including the gospel message. So what are we to do with what He's given us? We're to invest it into God's kingdom work - into those people who have not heard or do not know Jesus.

I love that Jesus says, "You have been faithful with little..." He just dropped 5 million on a guy, the guy doubles it and he calls that "little." It's a reminder that He has a lot more than that at his disposal. And that, as well, makes me eager to get about stewarding well. Listen, if everything belongs to God, it’s not as if he is relying on us to bring a return. It’s not like he needs us to invest the talents, or even share the gospel. But he *chooses* to entrust us with his resources and this gospel message so that we might share in the joy He has. We're invited to be a part of the process of reconciliation. We’re not going to be judged by how fruitful we are, only that we were faithful to use the resources He gave us well. And that includes being faithful to entrust the gospel to others. So what, exactly, is required of us when it comes to evangelism? Faithfulness. Faithfulness in proclaiming the message, entrusting it to others, is all that is required!

Just because faithfulness is the standard doesn't mean we won't be fruitful! They doubled what they were given! As we abide in Jesus, we will bear much fruit; however, we don't have to live in fear whether we are fruitful enough.

**We’re driven by our view of our Master**

 So we're all entrusted with something; most importantly the gospel message, and faithfulness is the metric, not return. But there's one more thing to see in this passage. Let's look at the third servant. **Read Matthew 25:24-30.** So this servant, who hid the talent, starts off by giving his excuse, “I knew you were a hard man.” The master's response isn't meant to be agreement, more sarcastic - "You knew that I reap where I do not sow, do you? Then your fear of me should have led you to do *something* at least." The third servant is really without excuse.

What would drive this servant to hide and then make excuses? That's the question that bothered me as I read and studied the passage. What would cause two such different reactions? I think it's the same reason my children chose not to try new lessons and why we sometimes choose to do nothing rather than something - He thought it would be too hard to get a return, so he didn't bother. Hiding it was easier, in his mind, than going out and investing it. Keeping what had been entrusted to him would be better than trying and failing to get a return. But what if he knew there was a safety net? What if he knew the standard was faithfully trying rather than success or failure? What if he knew that the person asking him to do this task was someone full of grace, who didn't need him to succeed but invited him to try? The more I reflected on this passage, the more it seems that the task was "too hard" for the third servant because he had a wrong perception of his master. The other two went out immediately and starting working; he hid his talent. He saw his master as a hard man, taking what didn't belong to him, but the other two knew him as a man of joy who shared that joy with his servants.

Friends, Thom Rainer is quoted as saying, “Early believers had to be commanded not to evangelize. Modern believers have to be urged to speak.” I think one of the reasons we struggle with faithful care, use, and investment of God's resources, most notably the gospel, is that we, like the wicked, lazy servant, either start with a wrong picture of our master or we forget who our master is. Let's take some time to remember who, exactly, it is that we serve:

God had existed for eternity past as a community. When he chose to create, he did so in order that we might share in his joy and love, and in that He would be glorified. But it became quickly obvious that we did we want God - we preferred to be God ourselves, to live the way we wanted, even if that meant hurting and oppressing others. We became rebels and traitors, walking in disobedience to God's commands, and as a result, we are people deserving God's just wrath. God looked upon us and, even though we were rightly destined for destruction, knew we wouldn't be able to save ourselves from the judgment we deserved, so he chose to do it for us.

We serve a person who, though he was God, did not consider his godhood something to be clutched and held tightly to, who left behind the community he had known from eternity past to become a human being just like us. God the Son joined the ranks of the humanity who had rejected him, hated him, and stolen from him and he lived the life of perfect obedience to God that we should have lived but couldn't and wouldn't. He did what we could not do in our place. He even took the punishment we deserved in our place; He bore God's holy and just wrath against sin, taking it upon himself, suffering complete separation from God for us. He did that in our place, for us. After dying, God raised him from the dead as a declaration that the sacrifice was acceptable, our debt had been paid in full, and now we might be reconciled with God again.

This is who we serve, one who saved us not because of righteous things we had done, but according to his own mercy. When He saves us, when we trust Jesus to be our Savior and Master, he entrusts us with his property, his resources. He gifts us the Spirit, time, money, the gospel, all of it. He then invites us to faithfully steward those resources. He doesn't need us to bring a return but invites us to embark on Kingdom work, sharing the gospel with others, using these resources to bring that gospel to others, meet needs, and make much of God. The metric is whether we are faithful or not, not how much of a return we bring. This is our master, Jesus who loves us, died for us, and lives with us.

This is also the gospel message entrusted to us; the power of God to save us. This morning, there may be someone here who is hearing this as if for the first time. Maybe you're feeling the weight of your offense against God, or you're feeling overwhelming joy knowing what God has done for you, or something else altogether, but you want to respond. I want to invite you to trust Jesus. When Jesus' followers were asked, "What must I do to be saved?" their response was "Repent and believe." If you want to respond to this God who saves, then I invite you to repent - which means to acknowledge to God that you've lived in rebellion and now you want to turn away from that. Ask for the grace and forgiveness found in Christ and trust Jesus to be your Savior and Master. And then, I would encourage you to tell someone about your decision this morning and to find people who will help you follow Jesus.

I don't know about you, but knowing who I serve, remembering who Jesus is as revealed by the gospel makes me want to go at once and trade with the talents, the resources, God has given me. This Jesus is not a hard man but one worthy of our devotion and obedience.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus has generously entrusted us with his resources - the gospel message most of all. He invites us to steward faithfully, judging us by whether we are faithful to try or not, not our fruitfulness. As we remember who our master is (as displayed in the gospel), we find ourselves driven to invest, steward, and bear fruit. Let's be faithful with the little He's given us; getting a return with and for the gospel. Be faithful to get out there and invest the gospel in others and at the end we get to hear, "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."

Thanks for listening; let's respond in prayer.