

## Bring Out Your Gifts! Matthew 25:14-30

Good morning! Folks, I must confess that I came up here with a heavy heart. My spirit is kind of low and in fact I didn't know whether I'd be able to preach. It is because of certain rumors about me that have been circulating very recently. I really don't know what to think and I just prayed that the Lord give me the grace to stand here before you.

Whoever started this rumor I don't know. But what is people gossiping about? Rumor has it that the reason why I entitled my message this morning as "Bring Out Your Gifts!" is because it is my birthday today. Folks, I'm innocent of any accusation like that. Yes, it is my birthday but that doesn't mean I expect any gifts from me you today. I don't expect any gifts. I just expect your presents this morning. That's enough for me. Your presents, right here, is more than any gift you could ever give...later.

Let me tell you the story about four people. Four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody was angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done. Do you want me to repeat that? Ok, I will not.

I chose that illustration because I thought this reflects the situation in many churches today. Many churches today are struggling to survive. Recent statistics say that up to 5000 churches closed last year. That's a staggering figure. Many factors contribute to the closures.

It could be internal wranglings, the lack of leaders, ineffective programs, and the like. And next year, it is projected that one out of every five churches will close due to covid. Yet, I believe that one important factor that could contribute to the death of a church is the passivity or complacency of people. When members of the body of Christ don't get involved in church as much as they are expected to, then the body or the church becomes weak. It becomes unhealthy. It loses its vitality.

I want to tackle this issue as we work through the last parable of the series we've been going through the past two months entitled The Parables of Jesus. What did Jesus expect us to do as his followers while we wait for his second coming? What are we supposed to do with the gifts and abilities and resources he has given to each of us?

This morning, I'm going to tackle the Parable of the Talents. Please bring out your Bibles and follow along as I read from Matthew 25:14-30 from the Christian Standard Bible. Quite a long passage and let us see what we can learn from this.

Note that the NIV, which I use most frequently, translates "talent" as "bags of gold". In this case, I prefer talent which is the literal translation of the Greek word "talanton" which refers to a currency during their time. At the time, a talent is equivalent to 20 years of an ordinary laborer's wages. In today's money, where the minimum wage which is 7.25 in Virginia multiply that by 20. How much? That's roughly \$300,000! And that's just one talent. So, in our story, the master is super-rich. No wonder the NIV says "bags of gold" to give you a picture of the incredible wealth of the master and he gives it away like nothing.

So, the master says to his servants, "I'm going away. Let me give each of you some money. See what you can do with it." I don't mind being a servant of a master like that. And he tells them, "I'll be back". The master is going on a journey and so it must be a while before he comes back.

We know that Jesus is coming back someday. We don't know when, however. It could be tomorrow, next week, next year, or it could take another thousand years. He told this parable about 2000 years ago. Some of his disciples back then thought Jesus was coming back during their time. But Jesus didn't tell them he was coming during their time. And he didn't tell us either that he was coming in our time. What he told us was just to wait which was the theme in the parable of the ten virgins. So, I hope you don't get excited when something unusual happens in our time. "Hey, there's a pandemic. Jesus must be coming soon." "Hey, there's now a chip that can be embedded on your wrist. The anti-Christ is here" and things like that. I think our attitude should be to look up to heaven but keep our feet planted on the ground. Look to his coming but do business as usual.

Now, in this parable, Jesus uses money as a figure of speech. It just so happens that "talent" is also a term we use for talent as we know it today. In other words, an ability, a skill, a resource, a gift, what-have-you.

So, this morning I'd like to tackle the issue of bringing out your talents or abilities or gifts and putting them to use while we're waiting for our coming King. This way it would help in keeping our churches healthy.

Now, let me share with you certain principles to learn or to know so that you can bring out your gifts effectively and appropriately.

### **I. We have all been given gifts.**

As we see in the Parable of the Talents, three men were given talents. The master left different talents to each of his servants. I am a firm believer that we as Christians have been given special gifts from God that we can use to help build up the kingdom and fulfill the great commission.

Now, there are two kinds of gifts. There are spiritual gifts and there are natural gifts. First, what are natural gifts?

These are abilities or talents that we possess since we were born into this world. Thus, some people have the talent for drawing or singing or dancing or what-have-you. Christians and non-Christians alike possess at least one natural talent.

A spiritual gift, on the other hand, is of divine origin, supernaturally given by God the Holy Spirit at the time that a person becomes a Christian. 1 Cor. 12:4 tells us, “there are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit distributes them.” What is their purpose? 1Cor. 12:7 says, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” Keeping it simple, we may define a “spiritual gift” as a God-given, spirit-empowered ability for Christian ministry. And combined with your natural abilities, they provide great power in doing great things for God.

The question now is, when does one become a Christian? A person becomes a Christian when he or she accepts Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. It means acknowledging that Jesus Christ already paid the penalty for one’s sins when he died on the cross and knowing that no amount of good works will ever take one into heaven. That only trusting in Jesus will. And a person who becomes a Christian is immediately given by God at least one of the spiritual gifts.

The question for you this morning is what gifts has the Lord given you? It is difficult sometimes to determine the areas in which we are gifted. The truth is many of us may be gifted in more than one way, but we all are gifted differently. I believe that we can determine how we are gifted and we have no excuse for not using our gifts. It is not an excuse to say, “I have no gifts” because God has given each Christian a gift. Romans 12:6-8 says, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously;

if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” Some of the other gifts are mentioned in different parts of the Bible like in **1 Cor. 12:8-10**, “To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.”

**Ephesians 4:11** give us a few more like, apostleship, prophesying, evangelizing, pasturing, and teaching. And **1 Peter 4:9-11** also mentions hospitality, speaking, and serving.

In our story, each of the servants received different amounts of talent. One was five, the second two, and the last one only one. It just means that each of us is given different amounts and kinds of spiritual gifts as well. So, I may have only one and you have two and another has three. The amount doesn't matter. What matters is how faithful and responsible you are in using your gifts. Like Tita Annie who has the spiritual gifts of encouragement and mercy, I think. Right? Combine that with her natural gift of music, then what do you have? A praise and worship team. Or Kuya Rey who has the spiritual gift of giving and combine that with his natural gift of spending and what do you have? Pearl Buffet! Who else can I use as an example?

So, all these gifts are given for the common good. Which brings us to the next point.

## **2. We are expected to use our gifts.**

So, the story tells us that the master left on a journey. He left them his possessions for the purpose of his servants using them so they can earn more.

The master must be a wealthy businessman and, perhaps, he was having a lucrative business transaction somewhere and he wanted his servants to attend to his business while he was gone.

What did the servants do? Two of them immediately went to work. They knew exactly what to do. Jesus expects us to do the same thing too with respect to the gifts he has given us. The problem is when we don't know how to use our gifts.

There was a thirty-eight-year-old scrubwoman who would go to the movies and sigh, "If only I had her looks." She would listen to a singer and moan, "If only I had her voice." Then one day someone gave her a copy of the book, "The Magic of Believing". She stopped comparing herself with actresses and singers. She stopped crying about what she didn't have and started concentrating on what she did have. She took inventory of herself and remembered that in high school she had a reputation for being the funniest girl around. She began to turn her liabilities into assets. There was one year when Phyllis Diller made over \$1 million. She wasn't good-looking and she had a scratchy voice, but she could make people laugh.

What I want to stress here is that whatever gift God has endowed us with, we must put it to use. All these gifts are useful for edifying or building up the body of Christ. Hebrews 10:24 tells us, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." I believe our gift can be used toward this end.

But, of course, these gifts are not just for us. They need to be shared with the world. Those with the gift of evangelism can use that gift to share Jesus with unbelievers. But you don't have to be a Billy Graham to share Jesus. Those with the gift of teaching can go to far-flung areas as missionaries where they can teach something that people can benefit from and then introduce Jesus in the process.

Speaking of gifts, I have a gift for you. Let me bring them out. These boxes contain something I thought I'd never receive.

One a half weeks ago, 30 boxes like these were delivered to my home by USPS. I wondered at first what were those. Until I remembered I had ordered them about a couple of month ago from a government web site that distributes the products inside those boxes. What are those products? Face masks like this one I was wearing earlier. Each box contains 100 pack of face masks with each pack containing 5 face masks. So, you've got 500 in each box. Multiply that by 30 and how many you have? 15,000 face masks. I actually thought that the agency wouldn't send me those boxes because I asked for too many. But Jesus says, "Ask and you shall receive".

God surprised me with that gift. They will last me even if the pandemic goes forever. No, just kidding. Actually, this is for our church. I ordered them for our church anyway. But why 15,000? That's where our gift of service comes in. You may not have the gift of service but this is easy to serve anyway. Each family today will go home with a box or plastic bag of 50 packs of masks. Good enough for your family and your friends and neighbors, etc. You get the point, right? We're going to do servant evangelism right in our neighborhood. You knock on your neighbor's door and offer these face masks. We will give you business cards that you will show your neighbor for them to know you're from a church. It's up to them whether they want the face masks or not. This will be our way of serving others, ministering to others in this pandemic. This is our way of telling them that Jesus loves them. Then, hopefully, that will open doors for evangelism. Are you with me or are you with me? So, later on, you can get your face masks. And those at home, you can pick up yours from our house. Curbside pickup only.

Btw, let me disgress a little. I'm not only celebrating my birthday. My wife is also celebrating a gift that God has given her today.



Today is her conferral day for the Master of Science in Data Analytics which she just finished at the University of Maryland. There she is. So, it's a double celebration for us today. I praise God for his goodness.

Ok. So, what are we learning from this parable? We have been given gifts. We are expected to use our gifts. And thirdly,

### 3. We will be rewarded in the end if we're faithful.

In verses 19-20, we see that the master came back and asked for a business report from each of them. One by one they approached him and showed him what the profits they made.

I love the words of the master to the servants in verses 21 and 23, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy."

The master was truly pleased. There are the words that we too will hear if we are faithful with what the Lord has given us. More than anything else, the Lord Jesus wants us to be faithful in serving him. We serve him by serving others. And we serve others through the gifts he has given us.

For those who are faithful to the Lord it is an exciting thing. If we are faithful to him the return of our master should be an exciting thing, but if we are like the lazy servant we should not look forward to that day.

The lazy servant did not get any reward as we see. Instead, he got a rebuke and a punishment. Now, different commentators have different views of this servant. Some say he is a Christian who is just not faithful and responsible or doesn't trust God enough. But then, he was thrown out and cast into the darkness implying hell because of the phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth". Which make other commentators say that he isn't a Christian after all. He is a fake follower and you can see how fake he is because of his unwillingness to obey and his arrogant attitude toward God.



And his evil deeds and intent are revealed in the end and so he was judged accordingly. In fact, we shouldn't infer from verse 25 that God is like what the wicked servant describes him to be. That description comes only from the mind of the evil servant.

But whatever the case, I believe the whole point of the parable is for us to understand that Jesus wants us to be faithful and responsible in the use of the gifts he has given us while we're waiting for him. If I say I'm a Christian, I must ask myself, "How am I using the gift that God has given me? Am I using it at all? Am I contributing to the health of my church? Am I getting involved in the life of others?"

In this pandemic, even though we are staying indoors, our gifts should not stay indoors as well. Let's bring them out. Let's minister to others. let's think of ways, of creative ways, to reach out to others. Giving face masks is one such ministry.

I should also realize that I owe everything to Jesus. Unlike the evil, lazy servant, I must be grateful to Jesus for saving my life. He died on the cross for me not because he wants anything from me but because he wants to give me the best gift there ever is. The gift of eternal life. Even though I don't deserve it. He rose from the dead to let me know that I, too, will rise from the dead and will meet him and that will be my greatest reward.

I want you to receive that gift and reward, too, if you haven't yet. And if you have, will you use the spiritual gifts he has given you?

Folks, there is no small or big gift in the eyes of God. The question is, what are you doing with that gift? Are you ready to bring it out?