

## Faithfully Using God's Gifts

### November 12, 2023

**Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church**

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We are continuing our series called *Parables and Possessions*, and we just heard one of our lessons that we always end with “This is the Gospel of the Lord,” but it did not seem very much like *gospel*, like good news, did it? It was like, “And then we are going to take things away,” but what is Jesus saying through this? Why is He telling this parable? Because it has to do with our need to always be thinking about ourselves. We talked about this a lot, about self-centeredness, about having everything turned in on ourselves when it comes to the gifts that God has given to us. It is so important to think about that and understand that our default posture is looking inward. Instead, what God says to us is, “It is time to look outward.” It is time to see Him. It is time to see His kingdom. So just like last week when we talked about using our gifts for the good of God’s kingdom, today we are going to build on that and talk about how we do that faithfully.

Now, this is the idea that Jesus brings. When He comes to the people and tells that parable, He is doing so knowing that in just a few days He will be going to the cross, that He is nearing the completion of the reason for the season, the reason for Christmas, that He was going to come and die and rise again to save all people from their sinfulness and bring them back to God. And so what He keeps imploring people to do is to change their mindset, to change their hearts, to change the way they look at the world, to say, “This is the way I used to look at the world, that it is all about me and what I can get, what I can do, what I can earn, the things that I can gather to myself. But instead, I’m going to turn that around, and in the kingdom of God, what is most important? And can I get after those things?” This is at the heart of our lives today. We still have the same struggles. Can we get after the things that are important in God’s kingdom?

In Proverbs, which was written hundreds of years before Jesus even walked the earth, the same concept exists: “One gives freely, yet grows all the richer” (Prov. 11:24). Does that make any sense—the more that you give away, the wealthier you are? Is that how the world works? The more money you give away, the more your net worth goes up. No, it does not work that way. That does not make any sense. And yet, in Scripture, we have this idea that when you give things away, when you are generous, when you are sacrificing, you grow richer.

This is about having that kingdom mindset. Think about the best Christmas present you ever *gave*. Not received. Gave. Do you remember what the best Christmas present was that you ever gave? There have been good ones. I remember some in my household. I remember that one of my kids got his first phone for Christmas. That was momentous. That is like a landmark in our kids’ lives today. Do you remember those gifts that you gave? It was your *sacrifice* in a sense, but it was their *joy*. And that relationship being built allows you to feel *richer*. Your relationships are developed. “Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered” (v. 25). In the ways that you serve, in the times that you have given of yourself, have you felt at the end of that time that you were enriched by that, that you got joy by bringing others joy? I think so. And I think that is what is at the heart of Jesus’ talk to us about our possessions. It is truly about looking at the world upside down, looking at the world a different way, with kingdom-focused eyes, and not self-centered eyes. Jesus went up on the side of a mountain and said these *Beatitudes* early on in His ministry.

He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). You would think the kingdom of heaven is for the priests, the pastors, and those who are really holy, right? Instead, the kingdom of heaven is for the poor in spirit, the ones who question, the ones who doubt, but still have faith—that faith of a mustard seed that is still there and can grow to be the biggest of all the plants. “Blessed are the meek”—not the strong, not the powerful, but the ones who are active in the background, the ones who are serving and helping others without

expectation of return—they will inherit the earth (v. 5). You see, Jesus keeps turning our eyes outward, turning us upside down.

Now, when it comes to our time, our talent, our treasures, our possessions, can we do the same thing? Can we see them through kingdom-focused eyes? Because that is exactly what Jesus has gifted us. You see, you do not have to earn your way. You do not have to grow your way into seeing and being a kingdom-centered person. You already are. From the time that you were baptized, from the time that the pastor put the water over you, or dunked you in a lake, or however it was, you have been gifted by God a kingdom focus. That is the Holy Spirit working in you and through you every single day. He gifted you this kingdom-centered life. A lot of times, it is just about shedding the obstacles that have grown up in the way to see it clearly. Possessions can be one of those big obstacles. Paul reminds us of this as well in Romans. None of us live to ourselves, none of us die to ourselves. So then whether we live, or whether we die, *whose* are we? Do we do this all for ourselves? When we die, what happens to all of our stuff? It is not ours. We do not take it with us. And yet our possessions have such a handle on us today. But they do not last throughout eternity. If we switch our mindset around and see that “no matter what we are doing, we are the Lord’s,” it changes the way we use the things that are around us.

Let’s get into this parable proper. It starts with this idea that we are entrusted with all the things that we have to use on our Lord’s behalf. We talked about this last week. This is the concept of stewardship. We are all stewards of what we have. We may have earned it through a paycheck or whatever else, but the Lord has blessed us with the avenues through which we got there. He has blessed us with those gifts. Everything that we have is His. Once you reorient your mind to that, you start to see that we are simply trusted with those things. And it is not just the money. It is the people that you are sitting next to. He has entrusted you with your family, your friends, your church members, brothers and sisters. Through these relationships, you can encourage and grow and make the kingdom grow, or you can try to pull them all to yourself and be selfish or neglect. We are stewards.

So, this is what Jesus says: For the kingdom of heaven, for it—the kingdom of God, the way that we live, the new heavens, the new earth—for it is like a man going on a journey who calls his servants and entrusts to them his property (Matt. 25:14). Again, Jesus says the master is God, of course, the servants are us. And He is entrusting us with His stuff. What has God created? Everything. God has created everything. So what is He entrusted to His servants? Everything. Everything is entrusted to His servants. To one, he gave much, five talents. A talent was about 20 years of wages. 20 years. So, five talents is about a hundred years of wages or more. This is an absurd amount of money and wealth. Money and wealth are not the point. The point is what the people do with it. So, to one, he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, and they each went away to do what they would do.

The one who had the five talents traded with what he received and made five more. The one who had two did the same thing and made two more. But the one who had one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now, typically, the third person in the story is the one who always does the wrong stuff. That is just how it goes. So, we know he is doing the wrong thing. But it does not seem that crazy. Because if you lived in a time of war, or a time when people could come in and take your things, where is one kind of safe place that you could hide it, to make sure you could go back whenever the master called? It is always there. It is safe. You have your little map with "the X marks the spot." You can go find it again. So, it is not too crazy. But he dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

This is a reminder that the master, who is the creator and the owner of everything, is going to return. Even today, the promise is that he is going to return and one day remake heaven and earth, bodies and souls put back together, the resurrection of all things, and the perfection of all things. All those things that you worried about in the car coming over here that I hope when you walked through these doors you were able to simply release, all those things, the suffering, the aches and pains that you woke up this morning, the people that you are crying for right now, and mourning for, all that will be gone. On that day, Jesus will make everything new. Our

eyes are focused on that. Our hope is focused on that. He is coming again for a good thing. And when He comes again, what will we be doing?

Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, '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.' (vv. 19-21).

Did the master care about the amount of money or the amount of wealth? Absolutely not. What did he care about? That he was faithful with what he had been given, that he stewarded on behalf of the master for the master's purposes. And what is the result of that? It is not that this person would get tons of more things and be self-satisfied with it. It is that he now gets to "enter into the joy of the Lord." That is the key. Why do we take care of the things that we have and the people that God has placed around us? It is because when we do, we enter into His joy. We get to see the goodness of His grace and action. That is enough. That is the point.

The outcome of our faithful stewardship is joy. Some of you might think in previous experiences with being generous, maybe the outcome of being generous is guilt. Maybe you felt guilty about giving, and the guilt drove you to be generous to others. That is not the goal. The goal is to find joy in it, to be released into that joy, to see that when everything is the Lord's, and we are simply stewarding it, the way that we use it for the benefit of others brings great joy, not just to us, but to the world.

The one who had two talents did the same thing. He came, he gave his two talents back, and the master said the exact same thing. "Enter into the joy." So, let's get to the good part here, where everything twists around. We are going to go back to what this third person did: "He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed'" (v. 24). This is a really odd thing, and it is supposed to be odd.

Because who is the master? Is the master the one who is not active in this world? Is the master the one who does not scatter seed, the one who does not let his word be everywhere and help it grow? No, absolutely not. The master and the creator is active, is here, and is helping through the power of His Spirit grow.

“[So] I was afraid. and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours” (v. 25). And what you see next is that Jesus does not focus on the outcome of his investment strategy. What Jesus focuses on is his thought. He focuses his heart on the reason for what he did. And what is the reason for what he did? It is fear. Out of fear, he did this thing. Out of fear, he went and hid. Out of fear, he changed his own perception of God to fit his actions. Because that is not who the master is. That is not who he knew who the master was. Based on his fear, he reoriented his whole life, the way he dealt with his things, the way he dealt with the people around him, and the way that he looked at God, out of fear. Fear is the thing that destroys the idea that we can live this kingdom-centered life. Fear is the thing that drives us away from seeing a God who desperately wants to be in our lives every day, who cares about us, who loves us, who even sees us when we sin, when we make mistakes, even the biggest ones, that comes to us because of Jesus and gives us full forgiveness. This is the God who is real. Out of fear, we change that. And we forget who He is. We change Him into being someone else.

“[So] the master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?’” (v. 26). This text is sarcasm, and this is hard to do when you are just reading the Scripture. You do not know what intonation is. He is saying, this is not who I am. If you thought that, then you should have at least done something with it and not hide it out of fear. So, in the end, all this will be taken from you, from those who live in fear, to everyone who has more, more will be given (v. 27ff).

Now, is this saying that those who have stuff are going to be given more stuff, and God is going to do more stuff? This is not about stuff. This is about us and God. It is about seeing what is important in His kingdom. So,

it is not about gaining stuff. It is about seeing when you are investing in the relationship with your children, when you are investing in the relationship with the kids that you teach at Sunday school, the kids at youth group, when you are investing in your community with kids that you coach when you approach them with grace and with love, when you help them grow through ways that are positive and build them up and are encouraging, guess what that is going to do? It is going to encourage them, and they are going to see that that is a way to live, that is a way to share this life with others, and they are going to do the same for others as well. You encourage that. You keep that going. This is what those who have more of the meekness in life, those who will inherit the earth, those things that God values, that is what more means.

Kindness grows. Goodness grows. So, take away your idea that this is about money, and instead, it is about hearts. And see it from that perspective. Because when we try to walk the way of Jesus, when we are disciples, and when we do this together in Our Savior's Way, it is all about courage, this thing that fights against fear. Our posture, our mindset, needs to be courageously stewarding all of His resources for the good of His kingdom. It is a hard thing to do. That is why we have to keep reminding ourselves of this all the time. But it is a good thing to do. Because it enters us into the Master is joy. And it helps other people see Him more clearly.

An easy way to remember this is this idea of 3P Generosity. We talked about this last week, that when we make giving back to the Lord a *priority*, it reminds us that we are first and foremost His and that all things are His. Today, we are talking about *proportional*. It is about proportionality. It is about committing to returning a portion of the time, talents, and treasures that the Lord has entrusted with you. It is not everything. It is not to give up everything. It is together, as a community, we give a portion. We give in proportion as well. This is about our hearts. This is about our relationship with God and our relationship with the things that He has blessed us with. How do we give proportionally? This is something to think about this week.

In the end, when we think about using our possessions and going through all this, it is all about joy. It is all about seeing that as we are generous with the things that God has given to us, we experience great joy, lasting joy, not just happiness, but a joy that sits in our souls. and nourishes us. Remember, Jesus' gift to us is a kingdom-centered life. I encourage you to be courageous stewards with us. And if you want to use this mindset of 3P Generosity, go for it. Give Him *priority, proportional, and progressive*. This is how we walk the way of Jesus together.

Let us close in prayer: *Heavenly Father, we thank you for being with us today, for giving us your word, allowing us to sit with this parable that is really difficult. But that in seeing that, Lord, you care less about the stuff and the possessions that exist here, and more about us, and our hearts, and the way that we use these things for the good of your kingdom.*

*Lord, we pray that today you would help us to see Jesus more clearly, to see his love for us, his sacrifice for us, the life that he brings to us today, that we live today throughout all of eternity. And let us have eyes to see that as our focus in the present, so that we may use all of our time, our talents, and our treasures for the good of your kingdom. We pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen.*