

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Occasion: Pentecost 24

Date: November 15th, 2020 - Grace

Give to Whom?

What are some of the best gifts anyone has ever given you? I want you to think back on a lifetime of Christmases, birthdays, and other special occasions. Which of all the gifts you've received stand out? Which ones do you still treasure?

We treasure different gifts for different reasons. Some gifts you treasure because of how useful they have been. The giver gave you something that you need, something you can put to work, something you can really use, maybe even daily. Some gifts you treasure because of how pretty or valuable they are. The giver gave you something rare, something beautiful, something of great worth. Some gifts you treasure because of how they are just the right thing for you. The giver gave you

something unique to you, something that says something about you, something that is special because of how it's yours.

But from all the different categories of gifts, whether the gift is useful or pretty or unique to you, there are some gifts that matter to you more because of **who it is that gave it to you in first place**. Sometimes you treasure a not-that-useful gift and even use it daily just because of who gave it to you. Sometimes you throw away a beautiful gift and never want to see it again because you don't want to think about the person who gave it to you. Whether the gift is useful, pretty, or unique, the deciding factor on whether or not you treasure it is often **who the giver is**.

When we talk about stewardship, when we talk about all the gifts we have received from God and how we want to give back to Him and glorify Him, that's what we're talking about, isn't it? Who is the giver? How do you feel about him? To whom,

exactly, are we giving back? Whom do we seek to glorify? Who is God?

Jesus illustrates this question in the context of stewardship with His parable. There is a certain master. He has three servants. He is leaving on a journey and so he puts each servant in charge of a certain amount of money. He makes them stewards of his wealth, each according to his ability. One gets five bags of gold. The second gets two. The third gets one.

And you know how the story goes. The first two servants use the gifts they have received. They put them to work and even double them. They must have found really good investments, right? A 100% return? Amazing! These two—both of them—are really good stewards.

But we have to talk about this third guy, don't we? Because what he does is he buries the gold in the ground and just waits

for the master to return. Apparently, there are investments out there that will double your money, but he's not interested. He's not buying. He's not doing anything. He's hiding his gift until the master comes back for it so he can just give back what's his.

And what's telling about this servant is that he never once forgets to whom the gold really belongs, does he? He knows he's only a steward. He knows the gold is not really his. He knows he'll have to give it back to the one to whom it really belongs. Ignorance is not this guy's problem! He knows what he's been given. He knows why he's got it and what he's supposed to do with it. He knows who it is that gave it to him. He gets it.

But he still does wrong, doesn't he? His master returns and is not happy. And this third servant seems to have expected it. The problem is not with what the servant doesn't know. The problem is in what he thinks he does know. The problem is not

that he doesn't know that the gold belongs to the master. The problem is that he hates his master. And it shows, in what he does with gold and in what he says to his master.

'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' And that servant gets punished. He's a bad steward. He is bad not because he doesn't know what to do or why. **He's bad because he chooses not to do anything out of fear.** He decides to be a bad steward because he thinks his master is an unfair bully. And should he be surprised that his master is angry? Of course not. He is punished. His gift is taken from him. He is cast out into the darkness. He is rejected by the master whom he rejected. He gets what he deserves.

And, of course, we see the parallel in our lives, don't we?

We have a master, God, to whom everything really belongs because He created it all and sustains it all. And He gives gifts to us. He gives us time on this earth. God gives us our talents and skills. God gives us treasure, wealth, and material goods. And God gives us the truth of His Word. It's all His. But He makes us His servants. His stewards, taking care of what belongs to Him.

And we know exactly what we have been given. And we know why He gave it to us and what it's all for. And we know exactly who it is that gave it to us. And you and I, we love Him! We don't hate him, do we? So we should be the best stewards, shouldn't we? Knowing what we have and who it's from and to whom it belongs. All that should show in what we do with His gifts, shouldn't it? But does it?

You know your time is not yours but God's. So what does the way you use God's time say about how you feel toward God?

Do you treasure it? Or do you throw it away?

You know your talents are not yours but God's. So what does the way you use them say about how you feel towards God?

Do you put them to work? Or do you bury them in the dirt?

You know your treasure is not yours but God's. So are you investing wisely? Or are you letting it sit until God demands it back from you?

I must confess I have never been a big fan of this parable! How about you? I have never liked it, because I have never found a 100% return on investment for anything God has given me. I can think of any gift that God has given me that I haven't failed—in some way—to treasure properly. I'm a bad steward! I'm here wasting time, and hiding talents, and sitting on treasure until God demands it all back from me. And do I have any reason to expect anything less than punishment? Do you?

Is that the point of this parable, though? Does Jesus tell us a parable about stewardship only to tell us something about ourselves? Only to make us feel bad for being bad stewards?

Or let me ask it my question this way: **why was the bad steward bad?** He tells us why. **He was motivated by fear.** Fear made him sit on the gold and do nothing. So can it really be Jesus' point to make us afraid of punishment? By the rules of this parable, wouldn't that motivate us to be bad and do nothing?

Yes, this parable tells us something about ourselves. About our sinful natures. About our failings to be good stewards. But more importantly, in this parable **Jesus tells us something about the master.** Jesus is telling us something about God.

Who is God? God is the Lord. He is the master. He is the creator and the sustainer. He owns everything. He is the giver of every gift. And He doesn't cease to own everything when He

gives things to us. He still owns it all, even as He lets us use some of it for some time.

God is also the LORD. He is the Savior. The **“it”** at the beginning of the parable... When Jesus says, **“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey...”** That **“it”** is the theme of all the parables in this section of scripture. **Jesus is describing the Kingdom of Heaven.** He’s saying, **“Dear Christians, this is what it’s like to be in God’s kingdom. This is what goes on in the Church. This is what goes on among God’s people, who are God’s people because of Me.”**

Jesus says, **“God is Lord. He made you. And I am LORD. I bought you for Myself.”**

Jesus says, **“I saved you from your sin with my life. I paid for your sin with my death. I was the best steward of what God gave me in life, in order to pay for your failures and give**

you eternal life.”

Jesus says, **“You’re in God’s kingdom because of Me. You’re a part of the Kingdom of Heaven because that’s what I won for you. Now, here’s what that’s like...”**

And here is what that’s like: God owns everything. He gives us some things. He lets us take care of them. He lets us be His stewards. And in being stewards, we get to show Him and each other how we feel about Him.

You and I are **not** the third servant. That’s not who God created us to be. That’s not who Jesus saved us to be. That’s not who we want to be because we don’t just know who our master is. We love Him, because, in Jesus, He has loved us.

At the end of the parable, Jesus says something that sounds scary if we’re stuck seeing ourselves as the third servant. He says, **“For whoever has will be given more, and they will have**

an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.” That’s scary if we’re the third servant, who does not have and so loses even more.

But that’s not who we are! Not in Jesus! In Jesus we are the **“whoever has”** who **“will be given more.”** We have faith in Jesus. He gave it to us himself in his gospel. He sends his Holy Spirit into our hearts through Baptism, and the Word, and Holy Communion. He gives us faith and through the gift of faith he gives us life and forgiveness and peace and heaven.

And then he gives even more. He gives us time, talent, treasure and his truth. And he gives us the ability to see that those things aren’t ours. They are his. And so as we are stewards of his gifts, we get to show him and each other what he means to us. We get to show our faith in our stewardship. We get to show the gift of faith in how we treasure all God’s gifts.

How do you treasure a useful gift? By using it, right? How do you treasure a pretty gift? By putting it on display and showing it off. How do you treasure a unique gift? By letting it say something about you.

But for us, as Christian stewards... Whether the gift is useful or pretty or unique to us, all our gifts matter to us because of who it is that gave them in the first place. Whether the gift is useful, pretty, or unique, the thing we treasure about all our gifts is that they come from God.

So he's the one we give back to when we use our useful gifts. We use them for what they are for. Useful things get used. We put them to work. We exercise them. We take care of them so that there can be even more. More, not for us, but for God.

God's the one we give back to when we put our pretty gifts on display. We use them for what they are for. Beautiful things

are for seeing and appreciating. We show them off. Not so that we can get glory or praise, but so that he can. Whatever beauty we have comes from him and so we don't hide it in false humility. We show it off and give glory to God.

And God's the one we give back to when we celebrate the unique gifts he's given just to us. We use them for what they are for. What God has given just to us makes us unique and special. That's what makes us us. So we let our uniqueness show and we praise God for the uniqueness God has given to others. If he had wanted us all to be the same, he'd have made us that way. But he didn't. So that we can use our different gifts to serve each other and praise him who made us so special and loves us so much.

In all of our using all of our gifts all of the time, it's all about the giver. It's all about God's goodness. It's all about God's love. It's all about faith in Jesus and the shower of

blessings that God gives us through his Son. So, some of God's gifts go back to him by going into the offering plate, getting used around church, getting spent here. And some of them praise and glorify and give thanks to God by getting used and put on display and spent out there; at home and in world. And with all of it, we're always saying something about who it is that has given us such goodness and love and blessings. We treasure all God's gifts because we treasure him. We treasure the relationship with himself that he won for us in Jesus. We treasure the truth of God's Word. The truth about Jesus. Our Master. Our Lord. Our Savior. Amen.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58)