

Sermon Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ *“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’*

²¹ *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’*

²² *“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’*

²³ *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’*

²⁴ *“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’*

²⁶ *“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.*

²⁸ *“‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

Sermon Theme: What Really Matters is Knowing the Master

You start talking to your friend in the store when they ask you, “Do you know *this person?*” To a point that's a loaded question; what do you mean by *know*? There are

many people in our lives that we say we know. But by that we really mean: I know their face, their name, maybe a couple facts about them. But we don't really *know* them.

When we look at the three different servants in Jesus' story, we see a big difference between knowing and really knowing the master. That's the problem for the third servant who receives the one bag of gold and hides it in a hole. It wasn't that he receives less than the other two; when he's making the excuses for what he did, he never mentions the amount. Again we see that the amounts are not all that important. What does matter is how you use the amount you receive. What matters is really knowing the master.

In Jesus' story, before the master leaves on his journey he entrusts his wealth to his servants. When he returns, the master wants to see how his servants did with his things. You can see how excited those first servants are when the master returns and they are able to show him what they were able to accomplish. It's more difficult to read the third servant. He claims he knows the master, **I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.** ²⁵ **So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'** At first glance this sounds like a guy who is very afraid of his master. But is he? The master replies, **You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?** ²⁷ **Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.** He's saying to the servant, "If you were really afraid of me, you should have, would have done something...anything; put the money in the bank and invest it in some way. But no. You did nothing."

What was the servant's problem? It wasn't fear. No, the problem is that the servant doesn't care what the master thinks or how the master feels. He isn't bothered with how the master might react. He holds no love for the gift; he has no love for the master.

We are all servants of the one Master, the Lord of all—"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the earth and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). And as the master in Jesus' story entrusts his servants with his wealth, so our master, the Lord God, entrusts you with his wealth. That means the Lord gives you his things and trusts you to care for them. But that doesn't mean that those things stop belonging to God. They are still his. Your phone—belongs to God. The shoes on your feet and shirt on your back; the food you eat and house you cook it in—God's. "*But didn't I work for it? Wasn't it with my sweat, my energy, my time, that I bought those for myself?*" The job

you have, the talents you use, the very air you breathe—God’s. If you can be the least bit kind and helpful to others, those gifts also come from God. He entrusts them to us. And that same Lord wants to be sure that you are using all of it, every bit of it, to honor him.

Or are you burying those gifts in different holes? Like the servant in Jesus’ story, you may see the Lord as an overbearing task-master who is asking too much from you. There simply doesn’t seem to be enough time in the day, money coming in, energy or ability to do it all when it seems God is asking more and more from you. It’s so easy for us to fall into the mindset that I worked for it so that means it belongs to me and I can do what I want with it. Like someone who may encourage you to stay mad and upset, the devil encourages your sinful nature that God is not being fair when he is always demanding and too often seems like he is holding back.

And then what happens? Instead of trusting God’s promises, I doubt. We bury the gifts in trying get a certain amount in the bank account or having certain things. We bury the gifts in working to be more noticed, to be part of a certain friend’s group, in something to fill a hole in our lives. We bury it simply in the things I like to do. Understand correctly, if you have a nice place to live, a nice car to drive, you spend money on things you enjoy in your life, that’s not wrong or sinful at all. The gifts you have God gives. God wants you to have them and he wants you to enjoy them! Thank God and take good care of what God gives. But also, take look at what you have and ask, *“How much of what God has given to me have I buried in me rather than directing every gift toward the glory of God and the good of others?”*

This is a serious question and one we want to be honest with ourselves in our answers. Because look at what happens to that servant who buries his bag of gold. The master in Jesus’ story orders, “Take that bag of gold from him and, **‘Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’**” Seven different times Jesus uses this illustration to describe hell as a place of eternal darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth reserved for the devil and his angels and all who rebel and turn from God. What’s the wicked servant’s great rebellion? It’s not dealing drugs, it’s not for murder, and it’s not what society sees as “big” horrible crimes. It’s doing nothing—not using God’s gifts for God’s glory. He was not faithful with the gifts the master entrusts him. God is very serious about how we use his gifts.

So what makes these other two servants so special? They know the master and the master knows them. You wouldn’t give a complete stranger on the street the key to your house and ask them to keep an eye on your stuff for the next couple of weeks while you are out of town. You entrust that with someone you really know. The

master knows his servants and loves them so he gives and entrusts them with his wealth. And because the servants love their master, they know what he expects from them, and they gladly do it. They know it's not their own wealth; it's a gift that the master trusts they will use properly. Look what they say when the master returns: "Master, here's your things you gave me! Look at what I was able to do because you gave me this in the first place!"

God forgive me for when I have not been faithful with his gifts. You and I know how we selfishly see my time as more important than someone else. I know how I have used my talents to build up my reputation and boost my self-pride. You know how you use your money for self-centered wants. You and I know how easily we say we know all things belong to God but then act and use those gifts as if we believe the exact opposite. Lord, forgive me.

And he does. That's how much your master loves you. He doesn't just give you what you need for your physical life, he gives you what you need for your eternal life with Jesus. The Father knows full well the suffering and pain that Jesus came to experience. He knows that when Jesus hangs on the cross claiming all your selfish sin to be his own that he had to punish Jesus. He is the just Lord. Payment has to be made. He needs to make sure every sin is paid for in full. And so the Father forsakes his only Son, completely cuts Jesus off from his love, so that Jesus endures the darkness of hell on the cross. He suffers the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth so that the Lord does not throw you out into it. While you were still a sinner, Christ selflessly gives you all. And in place of your sins God gives you Jesus' perfect life and his never-ending love. He wraps you in it when God puts his name on you at your baptism, washes away your sins, and calls you his child. He continues to wrap you in it when he puts that love in your hand and in your mouth at the Lord's Supper and tells you again, "Go in peace, your sins are forgiven."

God so thoroughly forgives your sins that he entrusts you with his wealth, with these gifts in your life, blesses your efforts with them, and then commends you for your good work. Those who are honest with themselves about their sin see the greatness of God's love and know there is nothing better for us to hear from our Master than, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Join in your master's happiness." The only thing that is going to kick us into gear and move us to devote ourselves and to serving him with these gifts comes from really knowing the Master and his love for us. Amen.