

## **Selected Sermons #13**

The Festival Half of the Church Year by E. Schaller

**Matthew 25:14-30    Septuagesima**

“Again, it (the Kingdom of heaven) will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

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

“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!’

“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’

“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!’”

“The man who had received the one talent 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. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belong to you.’

“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? 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.

“ ‘Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ”

**Dearly beloved of God, fellow laborers in his vineyard –**

When the Lord begins a story by saying, *“The kingdom of heaven is like,”* we can be sure we will hear something interesting and important about the Christian family of which we are members, for the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God is that kingdom in which Christ rules with his grace and love. It is represented on Earth by the Christian Church. To hear what the kingdom of Heaven is like is to hear something about ourselves – something joyful or very serious or greatly comforting. Such parables as this are designed to show what goes on in Christ’s Kingdom, shedding light either on what the King does for his people, or what his people are expected to do for him, or both. Some of the most vital lessons of our Christian life are thus brought home to us through these wonderful stories – and every parable of the Lord teaches its own lesson, which we must seek.

Before we begin, however, there are certain things you will want to know. First, that a talent of silver was worth about \$50,000 today. Thus the servant with five talents had about \$250,000, the one with two about \$100,000, and so on. Note further that the parable does not say that there were only three servants. In fact, we are left to feel that there were more; and three are mentioned only to show how the Master distributed his good – namely unequally – and to illustrate the points that our Lord wanted to teach. May we be granted wisdom to understand!

We must not say that we do not have \$50,000 or \$250,000 or \$100,000 dollars, for we do have talents, and money cannot measure their value. We in the Lord's Kingdom are capitalists. Even the worst of the servants in the parable knew this very well, so let us not plead ignorance but concern ourselves with the problem brought to mind in the parable, that

### **Doing business with the Lord's talents.**

**I. Some find it easy – and very profitable.**

**II. Others find it difficult – and a great loss.**

**I.** Let me begin by calling to your attention the outstanding and remarkable fact that **some of the servants** who were called upon to do business with their master's talent – although it seems a most difficult and doubtful responsibility for servants – **found the task easy and very profitable.** They made nothing of it, and yet made everything out of it. Thousands of dollars were entrusted to them, and they doubled the money; it seemed no problem at all. Here is where we want to center our investigation of the parable.

Surely it is plain that the successful operations of the first two servants were due not to their skill or experience but first of all to the generosity and wisdom of their master. He did not skimp with them, for one thing; he gave them good operating capital. They did not have to start with a dollar at two percent and build it up to a

fortune. Furthermore, in his wisdom the master planned carefully. He did not simply divide his fortune into as many parts as he had servants, but measured out to each one, we are told, *according to his own ability*. Every person – then as now – has his or her skills and limits. Each servant was different from the others in the friends they had, in schooling, in natural skill and shrewdness, in age and disposition. The master took all this into account; each person’s treasure matched their own capacity.

But most important of all, **the people who had an easy and profitable time of it** were people whom the master had taught to know him and his ways. The parable significantly says that he called his own servants. He did not hire strangers to manage his affairs but people who **understood their master**. They did not plunge blindly into business, and it was not necessary for the lord to say one word to them before he went. They invested where he would have invested; they did business in the things in which he had an interest.

In the end, therefore, the servants also came most joyfully to give account. They had nothing unpleasant to look back upon – no wild investments, no foolish speculations, and no evil quarreling with one another, for they needed only to bring their profits. Large or small – that made no difference. He who gained only \$300,000 cheerfully brought them and laid them next to the man who gained \$1,250,000 – for they all knew that the master would look not upon quantity but upon faithfulness

alone. Nor were they disappointed; there was no difference in the reward.

If in all this we see ourselves and what happy servants of our Lord we ought to be, although we are left alone while Christ is in his heavenly, far country! Are we finding it easy and very profitable, doing business with the Lord's talents? How generously and how wisely he has dealt with us! Here each of us holds in trust talents for good investment, and what a time we should be having with them. Need I say what they are?

Most of these things are priceless in value; therefore they are represented in the parable as talents, not pounds. And because we are inclined to treat them contemptuously, as every-day matters, it is good that Jesus reminds us of their real nature. They are values for us to invest. By their use in the right places we will end up bringing not only those talents but also many others which we have won for Jesus to him upon his return.

We should find ourselves doing business with the Lord's gifts easily – for not only has he been generous with them, he has measured them out according to our ability – that is, as we have opportunity to put them to use in our particular way of life in our station according to our age and position. A father can apply more and different talents than his child; a pastor more than his people; a merchant more than a beggar. No one has more talents than he can invest profitably; no one has less.

And above all, we know our Lord. We know the Christ, the Savior of sinners. We know where his heart is, where he invested his talents while with us on Earth. He sought and saved those who were lost; he invested in souls. Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it. Did he not train us? Will we stand idly and irresolute, not knowing, being at a loss what to do with our talents like those who stand idly saying, *“There is nothing I can do”*?

The road is open to immense **profits**. The words *I will make you ruler* are spoken to those who invest in the Kingdom of heaven, and we will be able to come to the final accounting with great joy, knowing that our reward will not hinge upon the amount of our gains but upon the faithfulness we have shown. Those who fall short into the end – who will fail of everything in the day of reckoning – are not they who received nothing to invest or lacked the required profit, but who never belonged to the Master in the first place.

**II.** Of such there are those, too, who find it **difficult and a great loss** to do business with the Lord’s talents. If you will cast your mind back again upon the parable, you will remember the servant who dug up the talent he had received from his master and in the accounting handed it back with a flourish, saying, *“Look, there you have what is yours.”* Among the excuses which he dug up along with the silver, we do not find that he had any fault to find with the talent; it was all right; he admitted it was worth hiding in the ground; it was a lot of money. His Master had been

generous enough, nor had he expected too much of his servant, for while the others had many thousands more to be responsible for, **this man had a light assignment.**

Casting about for an explanation of this servant's behavior, we see a strange contrast. The others had large sums to invest and had no trouble whatever. This man had one talent – and you can't say he did not work; **he worked hard**, and he must have worried plenty. First he dug a hole and covered the treasure to hide it; then he watched and worried lest it should be stolen. He made a real chore of it – **and got nowhere.** Why? Because he did not know his lord and master. He claimed he did – but as it turned out, he convicted himself out of his own mouth. He said his master was a hard master - and if he had been, what folly not to try to satisfy him!

But the master was not hard; he was more than kind and good. The truth was that the servant never understood his lord, never loved him, and never was interested in his master's things. He was like a stranger in the house. Of faithfulness and devotion he had not a shred. The result was as it was bound to be. The man invested his talent in the earth; he acted foolishly with what he had, and he lost everything at last.

Now if we ask ourselves, *“To whom was the Savior pointing when he thus described the tragic fate of the unprofitable servant?”* – we will not expect to find ourselves in this poor wretch's shoes. That is, surely we do not believe that any Christian is doomed to the fate of



being cast into outer darkness, for that would mean that one of us may end in damnation. However, there are in the outward kingdom of Christ many **false servants**. They do not love the Lord Jesus and **they are having trouble** investing their talents. The best they know to do is to dig them into the ground; plowing them into the earth, they invest everything in this world.

That is surely not true of us, who devote our talents to the service of the Savior – but even here in our own country there is a warning here. Do we find it easier to use our talents for earthly things than for spiritual things? What sort of Christian is it who enjoys reminding himself that he has much stored up for himself in his barns and bank accounts? Do we support the preaching and teaching of the Word as we support ourselves? Each and every one of us knows we could improve our performance.

But it is, after all, our hearts that will heed the lesson of the parable – and in the Lord's grace and mercy. He will cleanse and strengthen our hearts, and then we will have no trouble **investing our talents** in his service until he returns.

**Bless us, dear Lord, and we will be blessed! Amen!**

Rock of ages, cleft for me #376

Soul, what return has God, they Savior #404

We give thee but thine own #441