

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Trusting, Knowing, Seeking

Lesson: Matthew 25:14-30

14 "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.'

Thanksgiving is coming soon! Just thinking about Thanksgiving makes us feel happy and grateful. When you think of Thanksgiving, you might picture turkey, yummy food, and the cozy feeling of being with family. Thanksgiving is a cultural and festive occasion, but at the same time, what we should remember is that it's a day to be grateful, remembering the things that God has given us.

And, we need to know more about God. Knowing who God is, giving thanks to Him, I hope we eagerly await Thanksgiving.

Today in Matthew, we heard the well-known story of the talents. One reason the Bible is such an amazing book is that even with stories we already know, the lessons and

meanings can resonate differently based on our circumstances, mental state, and mood. Perhaps, even when reading the same Bible verses, the words and sentences that stand out as important can vary from person to person.

Last week, through the story of the ten ladies waiting for the bridegroom in the Gospel of Matthew, we learned the lesson that we need to be prepared for when God comes. Today, Jesus teaches us through the parable of talents what kind of person God is and what the mission and responsibility of Christians are.

The story goes this way. A man with a lot of wealth called his three servants before he went on a journey. According to each person's abilities, he gave 5 bags of gold to one, 2 bags of gold to another, and 1 bag of gold to the third, and then he left on his journey.

In the version we read today, the New International Version, it simplified 'a talent' as just 'a bag of gold.' By the way, a talent, 1 bag of gold, is like having 6,000 denarii. A denarius was what a worker earned in a day, and it would take about 16 years for a worker to earn what 1 bag of gold represents. If we think about it in today's money, 1 denarius would be around \$100, and 1 bag of gold would be about \$600,000.

Verses 16-17 describe well what the first and second servants did after receiving money from their master.

“The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more.” (16-17)

When I read this story this time, the phrase 'at once' made a big impression on me. Friends, what does 'at once' mean? It means 'immediately,' 'right now,' 'at the same time,' or 'straight away.'

The first servant and the second servant, as soon as they received money from their master, didn't hesitate. They put their money to work and gained profits. In their cultural context, they likely engaged in buying and selling with their money.

Friends, as soon as they received money from their master, they engaged in business and made a profit. They didn't hesitate; they didn't delay. As soon as they got the money, they took action. How could they do that? The first servant and the second servant knew what their master wanted and what they needed to do even before receiving the money. They had already planned and prepared for what they had to do, just like the five ladies who had enough lamps and oil, waiting for the bridegroom.

They worked diligently, and as a result, they doubled the profits from what they had invested. Therefore, the servant who received five bags of gold gained five more, and the

servant who received two bags of gold gained two more. When their master returned, they came before him with everything they had.

Upon seeing that the servant who received five bags of gold now had ten bags of gold, the master said to him, '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!' (21) The servant who received two bags of gold presented a total of four bags of gold, including the profit he had gained. In response, the master said, '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!' (23)

Friends, isn't the Master's response surprising? He gave the same praise to the servant who brought back ten bags of gold and the one who brought back four bags of gold.

Through this, we can see that the Master's focus is quite different from ours. We often tend to concentrate on external appearances such as scale and size. Therefore, we usually prefer bigger things over smaller ones—bigger cars over smaller ones, bigger houses over smaller ones. And perhaps, we might even evaluate having ten bags of gold as more excellent than having four bags of gold.

However, the Master's focus was not on external appearances like scale and size. What the Master valued was that both servants knew who their master was, knew what they had to do, and did their best in the tasks entrusted to them. To the Master, both servants were equally precious.

Friends, may I ask you a question? This part isn't directly in the Bible. But imagine if the servant with five bags of gold tried really hard but faced a loss. What do you think the master would have said? And what if the servant with two bags of gold, despite working diligently, experienced a loss? Any guesses on what the master would say? Life doesn't always go the way we plan. Unexpected things happen, and sometimes we face losses. If those two servants had faced losses despite working hard, what do you think the master would say?

Maybe, I think, even if they faced losses, the master, understanding their efforts, would say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!'

But sadly, the third servant didn't know his master or what to do. He didn't know how to use the one bag of gold he got. Being unsure and afraid, he played it safe. Thinking it was best to return the money without any loss, he went to a familiar place, dug a hole, and buried the money to keep it safe.

And when his master returned, the servant went to him with the one bag of gold and said, 'Master, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown... So I was

afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'
(24-25)

He thought he knew his master, but he actually didn't. When the master heard this, he scolded the servant. The master said that if the servant truly knew him, he would have done something useful with the money, like putting it in the bank to earn interest, instead of burying it in the ground due to fear of losing it.

Of course, the master's rebuke wasn't about the lack of profit but about the servant's lack of trust in him, not knowing him, and not understanding what he should have done. It was an issue with their relationship. Because the servant didn't know his master, he acted based on what he thought was right. However, the master's focus was entirely different.

What we can learn from the third servant is that we always need to examine whether our journey of faith aligns with God's will, and whether our ministry reflects the alignment of our lives with God's purpose.

A true vision is not about pursuing what we think is right but following the vision God gives us.

Friends, what was your takeaway in this parable of the talents? Personally, as I read about the first and second servants, I felt comforted and saw hope. People often focus on scale and size, believing that the larger, the more valuable. Some even say the same about churches. People worry about the church's decline, comparing the past and present. However, size is not crucial in God's focus. What matters most to God is whether we trust Him, whether we know Him, and whether we understand what we should do.

And if we live, trusting God's will and doing our best, God will surely say to us, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!'

Trusting who God is means believing that He created this world and gives us his strength to overcome all our problems. As we approach the upcoming Charge Conference, we are reviewing and planning our ministry and budget for next year. Especially with the apportionment increasing nearly threefold compared to last year, it's causing concern and pressure for all of us.

But, Friends, we are Christians who trust and follow God. Despite life's challenges, even when the waves of life threaten us, God will protect and watch over us. I pray that the difficulties we face become opportunities to experience God's presence. I pray that in the midst of challenges, we trust God, feel His presence, and overcome difficulties, leaning on God.

Trusting God, knowing Him, seeking His will, I pray that you and your families have a happy Thanksgiving. Amen.