

At the Corner of Little and God

Matt. 25:14-30 (pray)

Charles Ray Fuller walked into the Fort Worth Chase Bank to cash a check. The bank tellers were immediately suspicious of Fuller and, after calling the account owner and confirming that she had not written the check to Fuller, police were called and they arrested Fuller. The thing that tipped the alert tellers off was that the check was for \$360,000,000,000!

The moral of this story is *bigger isn't necessarily better*. In God's economy bigger isn't necessarily better either. In this parable of the three servants Jesus teaches us that being faithful in the little things is no small thing to God.

For the past couple months we have been in a series called *At the Corner of Life and God*, and we will be winding this series down over the next three weeks, but this morning I want us to take a look at where the big things that God wants to do in our lives intersect with the little things that make up so much of daily life for most of us.

In Matthew 24 Jesus describes some of the events leading up to his return to this earth, and in Matt 25 Jesus tells several parables that instruct his followers how we should live as we wait for his return. And that's what this parable is about: a man is about to leave on a journey and he calls his three servants to him and leaves his money in their charge, five talents to one, two talents to another, and one talent to the third. The word "talent" was a term that initially was a measurement of weight and later became a unit of money. It represents all that God has entrusted to our stewardship, which is everything we have. Our time, our money, our talents, even our very lives don't belong to us, but to the Lord, and we are entrusted as stewards with managing these things, either wisely or poorly, in the Master's service.

There are two key words in this parable: *little* and *faithful*. The two servants who doubled the amount of money left in their charge both received the exact same commendation from the master: [21 and 23] *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.'* Matthew 25:21 & 23

The amount they were entrusted with didn't factor into the master's commendation. Both were given a "little", both were faithful, and both would be rewarded by having more given to them and by entering into the joy of their master.

The third servant comes with the one talent he had received. He had buried it in the ground. According to rabbinic law that was the safest place to keep property and a servant couldn't be held liable if he buried his master's property. To justify his lack of effort to invest his master's wealth, he blames the master by accusing him of being a hard and demanding man. "The reason I didn't take any chances with your money is cause I heard about what kind of guy you are, that you profit where you didn't have skin in the game, and that scared me. Here, take your money back!"

The master sees that there was no noble motivation in what he did; he is just a wicked and lazy servant who was willing to insult the master to make himself look good. The master condemns him by his own words: "so you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed, huh? But I *did* sow here and I *did* scatter here – in the form of the money I gave you and the least you could have done is put it in a bank so that I would have gotten some interest back on it." The master takes the one

talent from the wicked servant and gives it to the one who has ten talents and casts the worthless servant into outer darkness. It does not end well for that servant.

Jesus leaves this parable with us to instruct us how we should live while waiting for his return. The Lord has entrusted every one of us with “talents” and he expects us to steward them well in his interests and for his purposes.

Little things are a big deal to God

We tend to read a sense of value and importance in “bigness”. We use phrases like *big man on campus*, *large fish in a small pond*, *big shot*, *she made a big splash* and everyone knows we’re not talking size. We’re talking value. Importance. Worth. No one wants to be known as the little man on campus, or a small shot.

And yet, if we’re honest, most of us live relatively “little lives”. Most of us aren’t big men or big women on campus. We aren’t living life on a big stage, we aren’t well known, we don’t influence vast crowds, and we don’t write checks for \$360 billion dollars. If people point us out in the mall, we don’t even want to know why. Either our fly is open or some other embarrassing thing. Most of our lives are lived doing little things like going to work, raising our kids, getting together with friends, serving in church, maybe helping someone out now and then.

But this parable tells us that those little things are a big deal to God. God is infinitely big – if it’s even right to call an infinite being “big”. But He gives painstaking attention to the smallest details of the smallest microbes. The Bible teaches us that God cares about the little, and from this parable I want us to see three things about the importance of the little things in our lives.

I. Little things reveal big things about our character

The master saw that the two servants who wisely stewarded what he entrusted to them were faithful. In other words, you could trust them to do the right thing. How we handle little things reveals whether we are trustworthy to handle larger things. Jesus pulls no punches in Luke 16 when he says,

[10] “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. Luke 16:10 ESV

Little things reveal big things about us. If we cheat on little things, Jesus is saying we’d cheat on big things. If we’re stingy with a little, we should not fool ourselves into thinking that we’d be generous if we had more. It doesn’t work that way. What we are with little is what we will be with much. That’s what Jesus is saying.

There is something about little things that can actually provide a better reading on our character than big things. We can be lulled into thinking that little things don’t mean much and therefore what we do with them doesn’t say much about our character. God’s word would beg to differ. In his book, *Man in the Mirror*, Patrick Morley writes about a time when he was on an airplane flight and the guy seated next to him ordered an alcoholic drink. “That’ll be \$6” the flight attendant said as she served him the drink. As he fished for his wallet she got a call from another passenger and said she’d be right back for it. He sat there with the \$6 lying on his tray for a couple minutes but after she passed by a half dozen times it became obvious that she had forgotten all about it. Morley watched as the man quietly slipped the \$6 back into his pocket. Morley writes, “Integrity – what’s the price? Sold for a \$6 drink.”

The good news is that Jesus can transform our character from dishonest to honest, unfaithful to faithful, if we let him. But the place to start is with the little things, not wait for some big thing to come along.

Little things reveal big things about our character. Think about some of the stories in the Bible:

- Gideon allowing his large army to be pared down to a small army revealed a big faith in God.
- David's faithfulness to tend his family's flock revealed a shepherd's heart for God's people
- The widow who put two mites into the offering revealed a great devotion for God
- The young boy who brought his few loaves and fishes to Jesus revealed a willingness to give what little he had to God so that God could take that little, multiply it and make it much.

Little things reveal big things about our character.

II. Faithfulness in little things leads to bigger things

Notice that being faithful in little directly led to an increase in responsibility: *"you have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much."*

There is a principle or law of physics, whatever you want to call it, that we need to start small and build up. If you want to run a marathon, you don't start out running 26.2 miles. You start out by running maybe a mile or two miles and you build up. Start small and little by little increase your strength, endurance, lungs, until you can handle 26 miles. No one starts weightlifting by lifting 400 pounds. You need to build up slowly until you can handle the greater weight.

Jesus is saying that God gives us a little and if we can handle it, we are ready to take the next step and handle a little more. If we can handle the weight of 2 talents, God will give us more weight to shoulder.

As believers we can get stirred up to do "great things" for God, and yet fail to see that the great things God has given us to do right now are small things. The Lord knows that if we aren't faithful with the small things, if we don't want to be bothered with the little things, then we aren't ready to do the "great" things.

Notice that this isn't a formula for prospering. This isn't about getting more money. The master didn't say, "you were faithful over a little, I'm going to give you more money." He said you were faithful over a little, I will set you over much. It's about responsibility. It's about trust. The greatest reward God could give us is to trust us with more responsibility in His purposes.

Sometimes when the Lord isn't opening up new doors, or expanding our efforts, one of the things we might want to take an honest look at is, am I being faithful in the little things? Now I want you to hear me carefully. I am not saying that any time we aren't experiencing new doors open or an expanding horizon that we are being unfaithful. It might please the Lord for us to live our entire lives doing things the world would measure as little things. We may never make a big splash as recorded by earthly instruments.

Many of us will live our entire lives doing little things – God's plan isn't for us to be a "big man on campus", His plan for us is to be a "small but faithful man (or woman) on campus", and find our joy in serving Him faithfully in the little things. And that has great value in His sight.

But if we keep hitting barriers and doors closing that limit our impact on the kingdom, we should honestly search our lives and ask the Holy Spirit to do what David asks him to do in Psalm 139: *Search me, O*

God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Ps. 139:23-24) If there's something wrong, God will reveal it, and if not, keep on being faithful with what you have!

Being faithful in the little things will lead to bigger things being entrusted to us.

III. God wants us to be faithful with little, not play it safe with little

The wicked servant didn't lose the money entrusted, he played it safe. He didn't use it, invest it, or think about it. He buried everything that represented the master's interests and did his own thing, pursued his own interests, and forgot about the master until the day of reckoning, when he remembered the talent, brushed off the dirt, and tried to return it to the master. We might have let him off the hook, after all, he got the smallest amount of money of all three of them. How much interest could it have gained, anyway? And then the master gives it to the guy who already had ten. What's up with that? This parable doesn't follow any politically correct formula that we know of. If Hollywood were to make a movie out of this parable, they would cast the rich guy with five talents who doubled his investment as the greedy villain. It's easy for us to make villains out of those who have a lot, and excuse those who don't have a lot.

We can look at someone who has a lot of money and think, "boy, if I had what they have, I'd give a lot to the work of the Lord! I'd give so much to missionaries and to ministries that are dear to my heart." But the Lord looks at what we are doing with the little we have. We can look at someone like Billy Graham and say, *if he hadn't used his gifts for the Lord, what a waste and tragedy that would have been!* But we may not think it's a big deal to not use our gifts for the Lord. This parable strongly counters that. This parable isn't warning people who have a lot not to squander it; it's a parable warning those who have a little not to squander it. It's not about the amount, it's about the faithfulness.

I remember something that happened at Covenant Fellowship that underlines this point. A young woman told the story of how she received an invitation to the church at a car wash. She wasn't a Christian, but was at a point in her life where she was searching for spiritual answers so one Sunday morning she decided to attend a service. However when she drove up and parked, she became nervous about entering the church alone and decided just to leave. Just at that moment, a woman came up to her car and said hello, asking if she were new. When she said that she was, this woman said, "why don't you sit with me then." She sat with this woman and afterward the church had a chicken barbecue and this woman included her in everything. She got to know several people and began to attend every week and over time she came to the Lord.

What if that Christian woman had not gone up to her and started a conversation? What if she said to herself, "I don't feel like reaching out to someone I don't know. It's such a small and insignificant thing anyway, what's the difference?" God used her obedience to help this young woman in her spiritual journey.

When we say, I don't have much and I'm going to play it safe. My life is so small – as long as I don't damage His church, hurt someone's chances of receiving the gospel, and leave things pretty much as I found them, I'm doing well. Jesus would say, no, you're not.

Entering into the joy of our Lord is entering into the joy He has in His purposes fulfilled. The writer of Hebrews says that "for the joy set before him, [Jesus] endured..."

What joy? The joy of redeeming His people and opening the gates of heaven to them. The joy of his saving purposes fulfilled. When we serve the Lord – however small our service is – we are engaging with and furthering His purposes and will share in His joy both in this life and ultimately on that final day.

A strong, but useful, warning

This parable gives us a strong warning. The wicked servant was really a false servant. He didn't serve the master, and he had a wrong view of the master's character. And in the end he is condemned. Jesus is telling us that those who see God as harsh and hard, and have no desire to serve Him or bring Him glory, are not believers. They are not servants of the Lord.

This provides a strong, but useful warning. It warns those who aren't in the game at all – those on the sidelines with no desire to serve the Lord or further His interests in any way. This isn't someone who is an atheist, who doesn't believe in God. This is someone who's playing the game. They go to church, they pretend to be a servant of the Lord, but they don't serve. And they choose to have a wrong view of God in order to justify their selfish lives. They're playing the game, and Jesus is warning them: your excuses won't hold up on that final day, get real with God and serve Him honestly with whatever He has given you. Then that day can be a day of commendation and joy.

This parable also provides a strong but useful warning to all of us to be faithful in how we steward what God has given us. On that day, when we stand there beholding the glorious plan of God before us, the eternal souls rescued from death by the love of Christ, the kingdom of God wide open to sinners because of the work of God through His people, we want to know that we did something, we contributed something to that day, we didn't waste all the opportunities and resources we had on ourselves. We want to enter into the joy of the Lord, and that entry is, in part, because we were a part of it. We served His purposes with what little we had.

Has God given you talents that you're not investing in His service? I believe the Lord wants to meet us at the corner of what little we have and open our hearts to step out, take a risk, and invest our talents, whether it be time, money, talents, gifts, energy, creativity, whatever, in His kingdom purposes.