

## **New Covenant's Got Talent**

### **Matthew 25:14-30**

**David Sunday     January 19, 2020**



The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? Lord, You are the stronghold of our lives. We need not fear anything. You have triumphed over all our enemies: sin, death and hell. We thank You that our debt is paid and the victory is won. We pray that You would sustain those among us whose health is failing, whose hearts are weary and discouraged, those—which is all of us—who have stumbled and failed in our battle with sin and who need Your ongoing grace in our lives.

We thank You that You didn't think we just needed a little bit of help. You knew we needed a mighty salvation, so You are the God Who saves to the uttermost. You are mighty to save. We thank You for the way Your mighty salvation is reaching more and more people in the church in Iran, as people are being brought into Your Kingdom by the tens of thousands. We pray that You would strengthen Your growing church in that country in these perilous times. Make them firm against the foe and cause them to see with great clarity the hope that is ours in Christ.

We thank You for testimonies of how much they love and pray for the Jewish people, although the government of their land is against Israel. We thank You that they're praying for Jews around the world to embrace Christ as their Messiah. We pray, Lord, that that day would come when a great outpouring of Your Spirit would be known among the Jewish people around the world and that many would join us in confessing Christ as Messiah, Savior and Lord.

God, we pray also for the church in our area. We thank You today for Westminster Presbyterian Church in Elgin and for Pastor Doug O'Donnell there. We pray Your blessing on that ministry and for the empowering Spirit to fill them and use them to reach people for Christ in Elgin. We pray for Erik and Erica Schwartz who are serving in the youth ministry there. Please empower Erik as interim youth pastor, as we send him from New Covenant to Westminster to serve the students of that church. Use him as he preaches through the Gospel of Mark to them. Give him great insight into Your Word, and kindle in the hearts of students a love for You. We pray that for our youth ministry as well.

Lord, we thank You that You've placed us to be a light to our neighbors and to the nations. So we join together in lifting our hearts to You and praying in one accord the prayer that our Savior taught us. Hear us, Lord, as we offer these petitions as our corporate desire from You for Your glory. Let us pray the Lord's Prayer:

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Let's open our Bibles to Matthew 25 and read the Parable of the Talents, beginning at verse 14. I'm going to be reading out of the Christian Standard Bible. This is a very stirring parable for us on State of the Church Sunday. Let's worship our Lord Jesus Christ as we hear His living, abiding, all-sufficient, never-failing, forever-will-be-fulfilled Word to us, His people.

Jesus is referring here to the Kingdom of heaven, as He made clear at the beginning of this chapter:

*<sup>14</sup> "For it is just like a man about to go on a journey. He called his own servants and entrusted his possessions to them. <sup>15</sup> To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to another one talent, depending on each one's ability. Then he went on a journey. Immediately <sup>16</sup> the man who had received five talents went, put them to work, and earned five more. <sup>17</sup> In the same way the man with two earned two more. <sup>18</sup> But the man who had received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.*

*<sup>19</sup> "After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> The man who had received five talents approached, presented five more talents, and said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I've earned five more talents.'*

*<sup>21</sup> "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy.'*

*<sup>22</sup> "The man with two talents also approached. He said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I've earned two more talents.'*

*<sup>23</sup> "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy.'*

*<sup>24</sup> "The man who had received one talent also approached and said, 'Master, I know you. You're a harsh man, reaping where you haven't sown and gathering where you haven't scattered seed. <sup>25</sup> So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.'*

*<sup>26</sup> "His master replied to him, 'You evil, lazy servant! If you knew that I reap where I haven't sown and gather where I haven't scattered, <sup>27</sup> then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and I would have received my money back with interest when I returned.'*

<sup>28</sup> *“So take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents.  
<sup>29</sup> For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough.  
But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from  
him <sup>30</sup> And throw this good-for-nothing servant into the outer darkness, where there  
will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God.

A while back there was a program on NPR where an expert on religious cults was talking. In the middle of the conversation, he said kind of matter-of-factly, “You know, there are people out there who actually believe that Jesus is coming back.” Well, I’m one of those people. And if you’re a member of this church and believe our statement of faith, so are you. We believe Jesus is the sovereign Lord of the universe and He’s going to come back to usher in the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom. We sang it this morning: “He shall come in power to reign.” But to the world, that is so strange.

Although this sounds very strange to people, if you really think about it, it’s not actually so strange at all. It’s what every human heart longs for. We long for the brokenness of this beautiful world to be healed. We long for a restoration and a resolution of all that has happened in this world to take place, when “all wrongs are made right and when every sad thing comes untrue.” We long for a world in which all things will be the way God originally intended them to be—filled with justice, peace, joy and love forevermore.

That’s the new creation Jesus came into the world to initiate at Christmas. That’s the new creation He lived and died and rose again and now is seated at the right hand of the Father to begin in the lives of His people. And it’s the new creation that He will consummate when He returns in power to reign, when heaven and earth will become one. So the hearts of all Christians around the world cry out, “Maranatha! Come, Lord.”

Jesus taught these parables so that everyone can know how to live a life that’s ready for our Master’s return—whenever that will be. How do we “live ready”? We are “living ready” when we are capitalizing on the responsibilities and opportunities our Lord has entrusted to us with energy, joy and faithfulness.

Look at Matthew 25:14. It says, *“For it...”*—the Kingdom of heaven— *“...is just like a man about to go on a journey. He called his own servants and entrusted his possession to them.”* Here we have a good and gracious master who has entrusted something to each of his servants. He doesn’t give the same amount to everyone, but he is generous to all.

A talent was a unit of measurement in the ancient world. One talent of silver was, by any calculation, a significant amount. Some estimate that a talent of silver was worth about a year’s

salary. Others say it was much more than that. The point is not how much a talent is worth; the point is that the master was very generous. He entrusted a significant amount to each of these three servants. Even the guy with one talent got a lot. The guy with two talents got a huge amount. The guy with five talents was extraordinarily blessed.

Now, two of these three servants recognized how gracious the master had been in entrusting such resources to them. They immediately took what they had been given and went to work with it. That word “immediately”—which we find at the very end of verse 15—conveys in the Greek just how excited both of these servants are to be entrusted with the master’s gift. They are thrilled at the responsibility and opportunity he has put in their hands. They don’t want to lose a moment in throwing themselves into his service.

It’s like the old Scottish metrical version of Psalm 100 that goes like this:

Him serve with worth  
His praise forthtell  
Come ye before Him and rejoice

Why should we serve Him with mirth and gladness and rejoice before Him? Here’s why:

The Lord, our God, is good.  
His mercy is forever sure  
His truth at all time firmly stood  
And shall from age to age endure

Two of the master’s servants get this. They understand how good and merciful and faithful their master is—and they never forget that some day he’s going to come back and demand an accounting for how they’ve stewarded His resources. Look at verse 16. There are three verbs that describe what one commentator has called the “zest of discipleship.” I like that. I want to be a zesty disciple. Jesus gives us three aggressive verbs to describe what a zesty disciple does with what his or her master has entrusted.

- The first verb is they “moved out.” So they’re outward, not inward. They went out. They’re engaged in their master’s mission, not hiding together in a holy huddle.
- Second, they “went to work.” In other words, they’re active, not passive, energetic, not sluggish.
- Third, they “won” or earned. In other words, they capitalized on their master’s resources and multiplied his profit.

Friends, how do we wait for our Master’s return? We wait by being outward in mission, not inward and self-absorbed. We wait by being active, not passive. We wait by taking risks, not playing it safe. We wait by investing, not squandering what the Lord has entrusted to us.

Think about it like this. If you're working on a home renovation project—maybe the remodeling of your basement—and you hire someone to come and do all that work, you're looking for someone who doesn't just put the primer on the wall and then say, "I'm going to go out and sip some iced tea while the primer dries. Then I'll come back in a few hours later and do a little more work."

No, you want someone who, while the primer is drying, goes over here and lays some tile, or goes over there and does something else. You want a worker who is not just passively waiting. You want someone who's active and energetic and resourceful. That's what Jesus says those who recognize the grace and goodness of their Master are doing as we wait for His return.

Here's the thing. None of those three active verbs would be possible without the passive verb that precedes them all. Look again at verse 16. There's a verb that comes before all three of those active verbs—it's the verb "received." They have received something from their master. That passive verb, received, is the most motivating verb in the sentence. It's the freely received gift from the master that enables the servants to go out, get to work and earn a profit for the master when he returns.

Frederick Dale Bruner put it like this: "Only the freely received gift enables the outgoing works. Receiving precedes doing. Grace precedes work, but grace precedes work!" That's what two of the servants understand.

This brings us to a sad and sobering contrast in this parable. Not all three of these servants appreciate the grace and goodness of their master. Look at verse 18. Here we find a servant who, instead of going out, what does he do? He went away. Instead of going to work, look at his response. He dug a hole in the ground. Instead of capitalizing or earning a profit, what did he do? He hid his master's money.

Instead of mission, this man prefers isolation. Instead of energetic work, he prefers playing it safe. Instead of getting into the marketplace where he can multiply profit for the master, this man is only concerned with not losing anything. He's more preoccupied with his own security than he is with the master's prosperity.

Now look at verse 19. I'm thankful for the words "after a long time." A long time lapses before the master returns. Jesus is preparing His disciples for the fact that although His return is immanent, it is not going to be immediate. Though we should be ready for Him to return at any moment, we should not be disillusioned if He delays, nor should we be inactive while we wait. Here's an important point I want us to notice. It didn't matter in the long run how many talents each servant received. All that mattered when the master returned is whether or not the servants were diligent, energetic, faithful and joyous in the way they served their master.

So when he returns to settle accounts with his servants, he says exactly the same words of praise and commendation to the one who received the five talents and the one who received the two. Neither one of these servants distracted themselves by comparing themselves with one another. The guy with the five talents didn't look down on the one with the two and feel he was superior to him. Likewise the one with the two talents didn't waste any time feeling sorry for himself that he hadn't gotten more talents from the master. There's no envy, no self-pity, no boasting and no competition between the two.

They're both just thrilled to be able to come before the master and say, "Look, we have served you with what you've given us," then return to him the investment he had made in their lives. They both want to make a good return, then they both receive the highest commendation at the great honor ceremony when their master returns. Look at verse 21, and you'll see the exact same words in verse 23: "*Well done, good and faithful servant!*" It's not about how much money either of them presented in the end. It was about how faithful they were.

Can you think of anything more wonderful than to hear our Master's approval—"Well done, good and faithful servant," and to be entrusted with even greater opportunities for service? He said, "*You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.*" The reward of faithful service in Christ's Kingdom is the opportunity for even greater responsibilities and service.

But richer and sweeter and more thrilling than all these words of commendation is the invitation the master speaks at the end of verse 23: "*Share your master's joy.*" What an immense privilege this is when your Master is Christ, Who is Himself the living, incarnate personification of joy. "Come, share your Master's joy."

So the way to be ready for the return of Jesus is not just to make some decision in your life—"Yes, Jesus, I accept You as my Savior"—taking the ticket, so to speak, putting it in your back pocket, thinking, "I'm going to present this ticket at the gates of heaven," but in the meantime just live for yourself, protect yourself, giving very little thought or labor to the Master. That's not the way to be ready for Christ's return.

The way to be ready for Christ's return is to be in a right relationship with your Master, to see Him as good, gracious, generous and worthy of your utmost, so that you yield your life to Him as a response of gratefulness to all He has given you by His grace. That's how you ready yourself for His return. You turn away from an empty life of self-absorption—that's what repentance is—and say, "Lord Jesus Christ, You died so that I who live might no longer live for myself, but for You, Who for my sake died and rose again" (Galatians 2:20).

He died for us, friends, to save us from our sins and save us for His service. To be saved from sin is to be sent into service. To be rescued is to be recruited. To repent is to enlist in His

service. This means, sadly, that not everyone who thinks they're ready, and not everyone who even looks like they're ready, will actually be ready when the Master returns.

Look at verse 24. Here's a man who, just like everyone else, owes his life and breath and everything he is and everything he has to the master. He has been given significant responsibility, but he's been entrusted with opportunity that he completely neglects. The reason he neglects it is clear. It's because he has no love for the master.

He says, "Master, I know who you are. I know what you're like. You're a harsh man. You're always scrounging profit off other people's work. You can't be trusted to be kind and generous with your servants. I was afraid I might end up losing what you gave me, so I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Look, here's your money. Take it."

If he thinks the master is going to somehow be pleased with that, he's in for a rude awakening in verse 26, when the master calls this guy's bluff. He says, "Listen, if you really thought I was like that, why didn't you at least deposit my money with the bankers so I would have gotten some interest from it"? Notice the master doesn't scold him for not doubling the investment the way the other two did. He didn't have to double it. All he had to do was invest it to get some profit for the master, to serve the master.

The master isn't condemning him because he didn't do enough. The master is condemning him because he did nothing at all with what the master entrusted to him. He didn't love the master. He didn't trust the master. This is a reflection of a heart that has no devotion, no love, no appreciation for the grace and goodness of the master.

So the master calls it what it is in verse 26: "*You evil, lazy servant!*" It's evil. If you're not for the master, but against him, that's lazy and slothful—the very antithesis of a faithful and energetic joyous life of service. See what the master says in verses 28-29: "*Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough.*"

For those who trust in Jesus, from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace upon grace upon grace—more than enough from Him. But for those who do not trust in Him—for those who do not have a relationship of love and devotion, believing He is good and gracious, yielding your life to Him—it's a tragic end. Look at what Jesus says at the end of verse 29: "*But from the who does not have...*"

This is vital. You need to get this. Jesus is talking about a person who might look like a disciple or think he's a disciple, but he's not. He does not have faith in the Master. He does not have love for the Master. He does not have real appreciation for the grace and goodness of the

Master. Here's a person who is not ready for the Master's return. Here's a person who's not a real disciple of Jesus Christ. He does not have a right relationship with the Master.

In the end, the opportunities and responsibilities that were entrusted to this servant in this life will vanish. The breath he's been given and the life he's been entrusted with by the master has been spent on protecting himself instead of serving his master. It's a squandered life which will result, Jesus says in verse 30, in unspeakable misery: *"And throw this good-for-nothing servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Friends, this is a life outside the banquet of everlasting joy. This is a life banished from the gracious smile and gentle presence of the good Master. This is the worst thing possible that could happen to a human being. Jesus does not want that to happen to any of you, nor to anyone else. That's why Jesus is telling this parable. He came to deliver us from the guilt of a self-serving life and the misery such a life will result in for all eternity.

He wants us—He wants you—to enter into His joy and have everlasting joy crown your heads. So He's calling us here to trust that He is a good Lord, that His mercy is everlasting, that His grace is lavish—when we know Him as He really is. That third guy didn't know him. He thought he knew him, but what he thought he knew was not true of his master.

When we know Jesus as He really is, there's nothing that thrills our hearts more than the thought of His return. When we're looking forward to His return, we will want to do all we can to capitalize on what He has entrusted to us so that we can yield a favorable ROI—return on investment—for our Master.

All this to say, dear church, on this State of the Church Sunday, New Covenant has talents. We've been blessed by the Master. I don't know how we compare to other faithful churches up and down the Fox Valley and I'm grateful we're not the only people who are faithful to the Lord. It really doesn't matter what we've been given in comparison to other bodies of faithful Christians. What matters is that we know the character of our Master and wholeheartedly believe He's good and generous and that He richly rewards all who hope in Him.

Friends, Jesus has been very generous with us as a church. He's been generous most of all in the people He has entrusted to this church. We take very seriously our responsibility to steward this trust and shepherd you with love, integrity and care.

Here's my challenge. As we've embarked on a new decade, remember that Jesus reigns at the right hand of the Father (Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; 1 Peter 3:22). He's not afraid of anything. He will reign until He puts all His enemies as a footstool under His feet (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 10:13). Friends, serving a Master like this is not about protecting what we have or just avoiding doing something wrong. That's not what serving Jesus is like.

No, the Puritan Richard Baxter said this: “To do no harm is the praise of a stone, not of a man.” Jesus hasn’t saved us to play it safe. Jesus hasn’t enriched us so that we protect what we’ve been given to make sure none of it gets lost.

I heard a pastor illustrate it like this. When your child is learning to play basketball, what brings joy to a father’s heart? It’s not watching your kid sitting on the bench because he’s afraid of making a mistake. The dad doesn’t say to everyone, “Look. My kid is doing nothing wrong. Your kid just missed a shot. My kid hasn’t missed a shot all game long.” That’s not what brings joy to a father’s heart.

It’s when the kid gets out there and goes for it. He steals the ball. He goes for the layup and doesn’t freeze—like I too often did right under the goal. No, you want him to take the shot and you’re happy even when it doesn’t work, when he goes for the layup and the ball goes right over the top of the back board. You rejoice because he got out there and went for it.

That’s what our gracious Master and our God wants from His people. He wants us to get out there and go for it, not being afraid of messing up. Love has no fear of risk. Sure, we need wisdom. Wisdom keeps us from being foolish. But foolishness and risk are two very different things. Here’s how Greg Gilbert puts it: “Risk is doing something when the outcome is unknown and uncertain. Foolishness is doing something when the outcome is pretty certain—and it’s a bad outcome.”

Risk is good, even when you don’t know the outcome, because it puts the results in God’s hands. It says, “Your life as a Christian is not just about avoiding messing something up. It’s about pouring yourself out for the glory of your King.”

So friends, let’s reject the scarcity mindset. New Covenant’s got talent. God has been generous with us as a church. Let’s not think we are being faithful by merely holding on to what we have and very conservatively making sure we don’t lose anything because we’re cautious and afraid. No, let’s rejoice that we serve a King of such abundance, taking what He’s given us and putting it to work aggressively, so that when He returns, He will get a very favorable ROI from New Covenant Bible Church. To His everlasting glory, we His people say, “Amen.”

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