

Matthew 25:14-30

364 Days of Thanksgiving, November 20, 2016

Theme: Thankfulness Leads to Faithfulness

INJ The books have come in! The last three weeks we have considered together the overwhelming mercy of our God and the abundance he has given us. And we have thought about our response, our gratitude and our generosity. Our study in Bible Class has used the material in the book "364 Days of Thanksgiving." It has been a summary of several Bible History lessons and an encouragement to write down the blessings God has given.

Today is the day I encourage you to begin a journal to document your thanksgiving. Every day put down something you are grateful to God for. The catch is that you cannot repeat any of the items. For a whole year we should be aware of enough blessings from God that we don't have to repeat them in our journal. Of course we are thankful for things repeatedly. Every day we can thank the Lord for forgiveness of sin, for the sun coming up, for work and rest. But our journal is intended to expand our awareness and give us opportunity to grow in our grateful generosity.

We grow in generosity today as we look at a parable Jesus told. A parable is an earthly story that teaches a heavenly meaning. Jesus often used the pictures in parables to teach about the mercy of our God. This parable leads us to be faithful in using the blessings God has poured into our lives.

Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is like "a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them." From the amount of money he gave his servants, it appears this was an exceptionally rich man. One translation of this lesson tells us that to the first servant he gave "five talents of money."

We think that a talent is about 75 pounds. It is hard to be sure exactly how much five talents of silver would be worth today, but 375 pounds (not ounces!) of silver is a lot. An easy-to-use estimate is that to the first servant, the rich man gave roughly \$1.25 million to take care of. To the next, he gave about half a million dollars. And to the third, he gave a quarter million dollars. Then he went away on his journey.

Immediately the servant who received \$1.25 million put it to work. He invested it. He conducted business. He did his best to use his master's gift in a way that was productive and useful. The second servant took his half a million and also put it to work in ways that reflected his respect for his master. The third, however, took his 75 pounds of silver, his

\$250,000; put it in a box; and buried it in the ground to keep it safe.

A long time went by. Finally the master returned from his long journey and decided to settle accounts with his servants. The first servant came forward. He gave his master \$2.5 million and explained how he had worked hard to double his master's money. "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 second servant came forward. He showed his master an additional \$500,000 that he had earned for him. The master responded in exactly the same way. "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!"

Then the third servant came forward. He had dug up the quarter million dollars and gave it back to his master. Then he made excuses for not having earned anything with it. He blamed the master. He was worried the master would get mad if he invested it and somehow lost it. He had done nothing, so he figured he could do nothing wrong.

"You wicked, lazy servant!" the master replied. "You could have at least put the money in the bank and earned some interest for me!" With that the master gave his money to the first servant and threw the lazy servant out into the street.

The master in the parable is obviously God. We are the servants. One of the things we learn from this parable is that God doesn't give everyone the same gifts. To one servant the master gave five talents; to another, two talents; and to another, one talent. Each of us has different talent, interest, and ability.

The differences between us can lead to dissatisfaction. I wish I were good enough to make the basketball team, but I don't have the same skill as they do. I wish I had the opportunity to be the boss, but I don't have the right connections. Why does it come so easy for that person – I have to battle for every scrap I get! Sometimes we get mad at others for what God has given them. How foolish is that? Sometimes we get mad at God for the way he distributes his gifts. Isn't that also sinful?

Remember that even though God gives different gifts to different people, he blesses all of us with more than we deserve. Even the servant who only got one talent still received a lot—\$250,000 is nothing to sneeze at. Instead of comparing ourselves with those who have different than we do—instead of focusing on what we don't have—let's remember what we do have. That journal can be helpful for us to actually be thankful!

Look at all the wonderful blessings God has entrusted to your care—a home and furniture, cars and TVs, cell phones, riding lawn mowers, your children and grandchildren, your spouse, your friends, your body, your church. That's not nothing!

Everything belongs to God, and yet he has entrusted amazing treasures to you and to me. The main point of Jesus' parable is that we get to take care of God's gifts. Manage them to his glory and for the good of his people! The term we like to use is "faithfulness." God wants us to be faithful managers of his gracious gifts.

Faithfulness is a strange measurement. It doesn't look for the bottom line. Faithfulness doesn't compare what you do with what I do. When God expects faithfulness from us, he wants us to use what he has given us to the best of our ability. He wants us to keep in mind that these are treasures on loan from God. We should use them according to our ability to help our neighbor. We want to be bold proclaimers of the gospel of forgiveness in this world. Faithfulness is putting together your time and abilities and interests in service to your Savior. It isn't the same as success or profit. Faithfulness is working to manage well what God has given.

We aren't very good at being faithful, are we? Like that third servant, we get lazy. We make excuses for our inaction. The logic seems acceptable to us, when we don't help our neighbor or when we won't support our congregation: "All these other things are also important!" "I don't think I will have enough to do everything!" Is it bad that God gives us choices to make? Or is it an opportunity to be faithful with what he has given?

Wicked, lazy servants. All of us have buried God's talents and refused to use them. It happens when the screen sucks us in and all our time is wasted. It happens when we choose to pursue frivolous things rather than what our soul and our body needs. We stand around and talk instead of getting to work. We put in the least amount of effort, just to get by. We give in to our sleepy, lazy, lustful, selfish desires because it is just too hard to combat them all the time. We should be thrown out and deprived of every good gift from God! It is what we deserve.

But God's good gifts do not depend on our faithfulness. God is faithful to his promise. He said he would send a Savior from sin, and that is exactly what he did. God entered human flesh in the miracle of the virgin birth. The Almighty humbled himself under the law, to keep it in our place. Jesus was hated and rejected and beaten and nailed to the cross to suffer the pain we earned for ourselves. He was forsaken by the Father to endure the Hell we deserved. God gave himself to us. He is faithful!

God, in his faithfulness, has washed us clean of all our sin. The blood

of Jesus cleanses us from all our guilt. In baptism we were connected to Jesus' death, and we were given new life just as Jesus rose from the dead. You can count on God's faithfulness. Even now, when your sin shows itself again, God forgives it in Christ. Turn from your sin! Cling to your Jesus. God declares you not guilty. You are his baptized, forgiven child.

As his child, you have all these amazing gifts from God. Count the spiritual ones: peace with God, confidence to approach the Father in prayer, comfort in grief and guidance in life. You have a living Savior who is with you every moment. The Holy Spirit has put faith in your heart, and you desire to live your whole life to the glory of God. The means of grace, the gospel in word and sacraments is available to you. You have family and friends who want you to stay connected to Jesus and to live in repentance and faith. God has given abundantly!

We want to be faithful managers of all that God has given. With a heart filled with Jesus we do our work and make our budgets and schedule our time. Because our Jesus loves us so much, he even washes and cleanses all our imperfect actions and makes that astounding pronouncement to each of us: "Well done, good and faithful servant! ... Come and share your master's happiness!" Even though we are unfaithful in so many ways, God still says, "Well done!" because when he looks at us, he doesn't see our failings and faithlessness—he only sees how Jesus faithfully served, how Jesus faithfully lived, how Jesus faithfully died in our place.

As we see God's overwhelming mercy we want to thankfully and faithfully serve him. Do your best in school. Don't lower your standards. Don't accept mediocrity. Study hard. Use the brain God has given you.

Do your best at your job. Whether you are the supervisor or the newest hire, whether you are managing a corporation or managing activities at your home, whether you care for newborn infants as a nurse or babysit a three-year-old to earn a little money, faithfully give God your best. Be the best mother and wife you can be. Be the best husband and father you can be. Be the best friend you can be. Give praise to God by faithfully managing the gifts he has given you to use.

For the last three weeks, we have talked about what it means to be thankful. In the end, God's mercy is the secret to being thankful. God's undeserved love is the secret to happiness, the secret to true, godly success. See what God has done for you. Write down your abundant physical blessings – God has been so good to you! Use your journal also to recognize God's uncommon mercy in Christ. See Jesus. See his forgiveness and love. See the heaven that is waiting for you. Give thanks to the Lord by being faithful with all he has entrusted to you. SDG Amen.