

*We bow our hearts in prayer:* By Your grace, O God, grant us the forgiveness of all our sins. And by Your Holy Spirit enlighten our eyes to see both our own sinfulness and the holiness of Your Law, that our trust may not stand in the righteousness of our own works, but in Your grace which You have promised in Your Son, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to sanctify and cleanse us. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, CPH: p.341)

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Parable of the Talents that we are about to meditate on is taken from Matthew 25.

It is a small portion of Jesus' longer discourse on the Last Day and judgment.

Reading through this longer section, it is interesting to note Jesus' emphasis:

He is not so concerned about revealing all the facts about that day and its coming,  
but instead how we are to be ready for it.

Now with that introduction to this parable, initially you might be tempted to think that you are to be ready by being successful, by being the best you, you can be.

But that would be wrong.

The way that you are ready for your Master to return is knowing and having God's grace in Christ.

That is what the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 servants understood and the 3<sup>rd</sup> one didn't.

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*Our text for meditation today is...*

*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

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[Jesus said,] "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' 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.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' 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.'

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (ESV)

*These are Your Words, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen* (John 17:17)

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Your opportunity to be God's servant is a gift of His grace.

He is the one who elected you from eternity to be His, *without any merit or worthiness* in you.

He is the one who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for your sins and thus redeem you,  
from being slaves of the devil and enemies of God.

He is the one who *calls you by the gospel, gathers us* around His Word and Sacraments,  
*enlightens you with His gifts, and sanctifies and keeps you in the one true faith.* (SC: Explanation to the 3rd Art.)

He is the one who gives you your specific gifts, or talents, to be used in His service for your neighbor.

Before the fall into sin by our first parents, man had no qualms with serving God or his neighbor.

We had the image of God, a perfect knowledge of who our loving God is

and we were able and willing to think, speak, and act according to His perfect will.  
But after the fall, we lost that image.

We lost that perfect knowledge of God and the ability and desire to do His will.

Instead of knowing God to be loving and gracious, we tend to focus on His sense of justice, and His anger over sin.

As we hear the 10 Commandments, we are inclined by our sinful nature to think of God as a kill-joy, a tyrant, a slave driver, demanding what we cannot do.

This is what the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant thought when he said, **'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid...'**

And we are easily swayed toward this opinion ourselves; just consider the parable again.

What do you think pleases the Master?

He gives to the first 2 servants 5 and 2 talents respectively.

What do they bring Him back? 5 and 2 more talents. That's 100% profit on his investment.

How often have you ever received 100% profit on anything?

What talents has God given you that you're sure He's 100% pleased with how you've used them?

I can't think of a one in my own life.

And besides, who considers themselves to be a 5 or 2 talent Christian?

You don't have the kind of gifts that God has given to others.

Then maybe like Eve, you are tempted to think that the Lord has withheld good things from you.

If only He had given you more talents, then you could be really useful to Him.

If only He gave you more money, then you could be really generous to others.

If only you were younger... healthier...

If only He would give you fewer responsibilities, then you would have more time to serve others.

Then it is really God's fault for not giving you more opportunities.

And instead of using even what little we perceive He HAS given us, we bury what we have, feeling justified, as the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant did,

and as Eve did when she took the fruit,

lacking that knowledge of evil that she thought was so much better.

But that 3<sup>rd</sup> and wicked and slothful servant had it all wrong, didn't he?

Where did the talent he buried come from? Did he have to work for it? Or was it freely given to him?

So the master was looking to reap what he had already sown, wasn't he?

Was the master, in fact, a hard man? Did he give the servant more than he could actually handle?

Or did the master show shrewdness and concern in giving each servant according to his abilities?

And how was it that the master welcomed the faithful servants, not back to their servants' quarters, but to "the joy of their master"? Was this some fluke, or was it in his nature to be so gracious?

But even before all that, how was it that the servant became this benevolent master's servant?

Was it by his working hard from enemy status to master's servant?

Perhaps this question is making a little bit of a leap in logic.

Considering this parable, we have to realize who each person is portraying.

The Master is obviously a picture of the Lord.

But who are the servants? Are they all people? Or Christians and others? Or just Christians?

He is speaking about those in the visible church, those who call themselves Christians.

So this 3<sup>rd</sup> servant is one who claims to no longer be God's enemy, or a lost & condemned creature.

But one *who has been redeemed... purchased and won from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver but with Jesus' holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death.*

So this 3<sup>rd</sup> servant is one who calls himself a believer, but what does he believe?

He believes that God is hard. That He is demanding. That He is one to be afraid of.

From an unbeliever, we could understand this; but of a Christian? How can this be?

Sadly, it is true. There are those, even under the Christian banner, who think this of God.  
Some pray to Mary or other saints in hopes that their prayers will be more favorably heard.  
Some see the 10 Commandments as a check list for getting to heaven, the *joy of their Master*.  
Some think the Beatitudes are "Be Attitudes," a list of requirements from God,  
instead of a list of blessings God gives to them.  
But are we above these thoughts ourselves?  
Those 10 Commandments are impossible and yet required to be fulfilled.  
So how is it that we do not need to fear our Lord and Master?

It is through Jesus Christ, the Servant, and yet Master, of all.  
Though He is the Son of God from eternity, **He humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant.**  
He took on **human flesh and became obedient even to the point of death.** Philippians2:7-8  
He knew and believed God to be a gracious God.  
Even when the Father judged & condemned Him as the wicked and slothful servant in your place,  
His trust did not waver.  
While He was **thrown into the outer darkness** and suffered the **weeping and gnashing of teeth**,  
Yet He called out, "**My God, My God...**" and **commended His spirit into His Father's hands.**  
And His Father did not disappoint Him, raising Him from the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day,  
ascending Him to sit, not only in **His Master's joy**, but at His right hand, the seat of power/glory.

But this was Jesus. He was perfect. He could return to God a 100% profit.  
What about you? What about you?! You are Jesus' profit. You are what He gives back to His Father.  
He came to redeem YOU! The Master gave Jesus' your debt... your slothfulness,  
your discontentment with your talents, your wickedness, and He paid it back in full.  
And not only that... He gives you His good works, His profit.

Though Jesus was God, **He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.** Philippians2:6  
Though He had "millions" of talents, yet He emptied Himself of their full use.  
He used only what His Father allowed... and was content with it,  
using it always and only in service to His Master, for the benefit of His neighbors.  
These neighbors of His, weren't just the people back in the early part of the 1<sup>st</sup> century;  
they are each one of you today as well, because this 100% profit that He earned He gives to you  
in Baptism and the Lord's Supper.  
There He gives you His life, His trust, His contentment, His Holy Spirit.

Those 1<sup>st</sup> 2 servants realized this. They were not laboring for a hard Master, but a gracious One.  
It wasn't their diligence that earned them 100% profit, but God's Son and God's blessing.  
With such an outcome already guaranteed, and a Master so benevolent,  
why would they work any less than diligently for Him?

Dear Servants of our gracious and benevolent Lord, Jesus Christ,  
You don't need to fear the pressure to produce what you cannot. Jesus is your profit.  
You don't have to fear the Father's hardness or His anger. Jesus is your payment for sins.  
In Christ, your Master declares you to be His "**good and faithful servant.**"

And as the end of your life and the end of the world draws near, you have no need to bury His talents.  
No reason to be concerned that He will reap where He has not sown,  
for He has sown His Word in your heart, and Christ has sprung forth and grows in you.  
**He who has begun this good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.**  
And then He will declare to you, '**Well done, good and faithful servant....**  
**Enter into the joy of your master.'**

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*  
*Soli Deo Gloria*