

ACT OUT THE LIFE

The Joy of Stewardship & Servanthood

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Introduction & Review

For the past few weeks, I've been trying to get across the idea that in the very DNA which serves as the blueprint and fingerprint of *organic* life, God gives us a fascinating analogy for the core elements by which the *spiritual* life of a Christian disciple flourishes and is identified. To briefly recap, if you seek to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, then your life, like DNA, is going to have two major strands to it. One strand will be the priority you place on gathering in the community of other disciples. The second strand will be the priority you put on going out to live the faith we share in the world. Gathering and going aren't just the two sides of our mission statement, they are the two sides of our life as disciples of Jesus.

What ties these strands together, a bit like the molecular rungs in a DNA helix, are the practices of worship, growth, and service. To keep these familiar practices fresh in our minds, I've been asking you to think of them in terms of the impulse to Discover the life of God, to Nourish it, and to Act it out – DNA. Over the last two weeks, we've explored the Discover and Nourish themes. This morning, we're going to consider together the Act theme, but do so in a slightly unusual way. First we'll consider together a biblical story that zeroes in on the core values that motivate the life of Action. And then we'll close by actually watching a film clip of someone whose discovery of God and nourishing of Christ's character within himself led to a really remarkable life of action. Are you ready for this?

The Parable of the Talents

I invite you to open your Bibles to Matthew 25:14-30, where Jesus tells us one of his most famous and provocative stories. Life, says Jesus, is ¹⁴**like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.** ¹⁵**To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.** Skipping down to verse 19 we read: ¹⁹**"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.** ¹⁶**The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.** ¹⁷**So also, the one with the two talents gained two more.** ¹⁸**But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.** ²⁰**The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. 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!'"** Or as the RSV puts it: **"Enter into the joy of your master!"**

One of the things I so love about the teaching of Jesus is how he packs so much message into so few words. I mean, think about all that Jesus tells us here about God. God, Jesus says, is the wealthy, generous, wise, expectant, and appreciative owner of everything. He owns all the property. He apparently has immense wealth because he so generously entrusts many talents – literally thousands and thousands of dollars -- to just three of his employees. He does this wisely, Jesus says, giving to each person not randomly, but “according to his ability.” God gives people exactly what he knows they can use, if they are willing. And, Jesus tells us, God is expectant. He expects his trustees to use their resources well and to be able to account for how. He’s not some absentee landlord who’s abandoned the earth. He cares profoundly for what happens here. When God finds someone with a heart after his heart – someone with a passion to invest resources and care for people the way He does – he is so appreciative. Jesus’ story says that God is eager to entrust them with more capacity for carrying out his will. He wants them to know the JOY he perpetually knows as a Being who ACTS with all that he is and has in the interests of love.

This story tells us a lot about God. But it also tells us a lot about us. Sometimes I feel very dizzyed by all the different hats I wear, the complicated job descriptions, the mountain of tasks and homework. Do you ever feel that way? Jesus’ story is really good news for us. It tells us that at the core, our role in this world is really fairly simple. We are to be servants and stewards. If we could see God’s task list for us as we walked from here today, it would have only two action items on it: “1. Serve me by serving the real needs of people someplace. 2. Spend resources as required to accomplish #1.”

I am convinced that the more we discover the glorious goodness and desires of God... the more we nourish the loving character of Christ within us... the more this will come naturally (or supernaturally) to us. Nothing so reveals the quality of someone’s discovery and nourishment process as the quality of the servanthood and stewardship which flows from it. By this measure, it is very clear that the first two servants in Christ’s story had discovered the Master’s heart and nourished the Master’s character and that the third servant simply had not. What an inspiring gift it is to meet someone who has.

On many Sundays here I take the time to tell you how deeply your servanthood and your stewardship matter when we gather here. The ministries that happen in this building and through our shared mission could not happen without your investment of the talents God has entrusted to you. This morning, however, I’d like to close by reminding all of us what it can mean when a disciple of Jesus Christ is moved to act as a steward and servant as they go out into all the world. Even if you already know the story of William Wilberforce I hope you’ll be inspired afresh by the amazing grace at work in this true tale.

WILBERFORCE DOCUMENTARY – 11 Minutes

Surrendered in Service & Stewardship

D.L. Moody once said: "What God can do through one life fully surrendered to him, the world has yet to see." Thankfully, it catches a glimpse now and then. What if it were to meet thousands of such disciples – people who rose up from the pews and confessed, as Wilberforce did: "For too long my own distinction has been my darling object. But now I have discovered more. I have been nourished for something different. "I believe that God almighty has set before me this great object:

- To completely eliminate hunger and homelessness in this County...
- To end the loneliness of people whiling away the hours forgotten in nursing homes...
- To create a witness to a Kingdom culture that unites the races...
- To work till every human being has adequate healthcare...
- To draw to the heart of God each man, woman, and child in my neighborhood...
- To fund 50 Life-Centers in India or Africa...
- To end the sex trade in Chicagoland...
- To write a letter of love and care to every bereaved family listed in my local newspaper...
- To turn our nearby prisons from sinkholes into centers for human renewal...
- To build a bridge between Christians and Muslims no matter how impossible it seems...
- To unite all the churches in our area to address some pressing need...
- To create a movement that pictures what it means to live sanely and simply amidst the mad dash and crush of suburban life..."

What if God were to raise up one or two servants and stewards like that? Maybe if it wasn't even quite that large a vision, could we act out the vision and life of Jesus at a level of servanthood or stewardship we have not yet imagined? Many of you are already involved in agencies and organizations and institutions out there; you are already making a difference and God is NOT asking of you one thing more. But maybe some one of you listening to me right now are like that third servant. You've been burying the talents the Master himself has entrusted to you. Maybe some one of you listening has been faithful with much and now God is inviting you to be a steward and servant over more. Could that happen? Could you be the one who chooses to act. I guess it all depends on our DNA.

Please pray with me...

Our Lord and Master, thank you for entrusting us with all that you have. Lead us into that place of sublime influence and joy that only the most faithful servants and truest stewards know. For this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction to Amazing Grace Trailer

Before we sing our closing hymn today, I'd like to invite you to watch one last film clip. As the announcement in your *Resources Bulletin* suggests, a major motion picture will be released on February 23 that not only tells the story of William Wilberforce but pictures the life of Christian discipleship in a light rarely seen in our time. If you can go

see the film in the next week or two, it will help determine whether it gets a wider viewing in theaters around the country. If you can bring a non-church going friend with you, it may be a blessing to that person. If we can allow the film's message into our own hearts, it could nourish us, because it contains the message of God's amazing grace.