

Title: Being a Christian Is Not for Sissies.

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, infuse us with joy and hope that we may be strengthened to do your service in the world, thereby bringing about your kingdom, where we will enter into your joy, through Christ Jesus in whom we pray. Amen.

The Parable of the Talents is the last parable Jesus teaches in Matthew. It is easy for us to assume talent means something we are good at, but in Roman times, a talent is denomination of money. Obviously, the parable also involves the application of one's talents, which is only connected in this parable if one is an English speaker.

The parable is about a man who is going away and entrusts his money with his slaves rather than a bank. This becomes an issue later in the parable. Jesus' hearers might have thought this was preposterous, but it is the point of the parable that is more important rather than the details.

There are three slaves that the man trusts. However, it is obvious that his trust varies for each slave, because he gives each slave different amounts of money: the first gets five talents, the second two talents, and the third one talent. The man gives the slaves extraordinary wealth, freedom, and responsibility. It would take fifteen years of labor to make one talent.

The first two slaves are able to give the man a 100% return on the money they were entrusted with. I don't know about you, but I would be really happy with a 100% rate of return. The one slave that the man trusted the least buried the money in the ground rather than risk any investment or trade. The man was apparently a good judge of character of this third slave.

After a long time, the man returns to settle up with his slaves. The slaves appear to the man in descending order of trust. The first two report their 100% return on the man's trust. The man responds to each one with the same words, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25: 21b and 23b)

Joy is one of the aspects of heaven. How do we enter into joy? We take what we have and take a risk that we can do better and be better. Being able to improve ourselves and others also involves hope. Hope is a principle of Christianity. This is a risk of change. It is said that an organism or an organization dies if it doesn't change.

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Then we come to the "keep your money in a mattress slave." This risk adverse slave does not just return the talent, but instead begins a speech to explain why there was no rate of return. Not being a good negotiator, the third slave insults the man as being harsh. The man calls the third slave wicked and lazy. The man questions the third slave as to why the money wasn't at least put in a bank to generate interest. If the third slave gave his talent to one of the other slaves, he would have doubled it.

The man orders that the one talent be given to the first slave. Jesus then gives the main point of the parable. "For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away." (Matthew 25:29) The man then orders the third slave to be thrown "into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 25:30b) "Weeping and gnashing of teeth" is a favorite phrase of Matthew that the other gospel writers do not use.

During the last few years of her life, my Aunt Bernice spent them in a Roseville nursing home. She was no longer ambulatory. She had a lot of other physical problems before she was admitted to the nursing home. One time when my mother came from Utah for a visit, we saw my aunt in the nursing home. One of the things my aunt said during the visit was, "Getting old is not for sissies." I heard that same phrase several times visiting hospice patients.

Well, being a Christian is not for sissies.

The Parable of the Talents is not about being punished. The parable is about the kingdom, which is a place of abundance. The Parable of Sower is about abundance with a hundredfold harvest. Jesus describes feasts and banquets as signs of the kingdom.

So, in a place of abundance, more will be given. The first two slaves are eager to please their master and do so well. The third slave lived in fear and living in fear, that slave made bad decisions. The third slave was fearful of the master, believing the master to be harsh. The third slave was also fearful of failure. As the master said, even if the third slave put the money in the bank, that would be good enough and certainly a safe enough decision. But the third slave could not even have done such a simple and safe thing. There is no joy in fear. There is no hope in fear.

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Fred Craddock once said, “The major themes of the Christian faith – caring, giving, witnessing, trusting, loving, hoping – cannot be understood or lived without risk.”

I think that the first two slaves understood abundant, positive, and optimistic living. Is living in fear any way to live? Sure, we should be prepared for emergencies. That is prudent and is last week’s sermon of the Parable of the Bridesmaids. Jesus likes and expects prudence.

Giving Thanksgiving baskets to those in need is an application of multiplying talents. It is a sign of abundance. If we lived in fear, we would huddle around our thanksgiving tables, locking the doors, eating the meal fast so no one comes and takes it away. The same can be said about anything else we have. We are called to move beyond ourselves.

The third slave was thinking about himself. He wanted to preserve what little he had. The third slave was unable to think beyond himself. The man took away from him all he had. The other two slaves were fearless in doubling the money entrusted to them. Even though they were slaves, they applied their hope to do well for someone else. The money they made belonged to the man, but they entered his joy.

I remember reading about a little girl named Annie who in 1876 was ten years of age. She was put into a poor house for children, called the Tewkesbury Alms House in Massachusetts. Her mother had died and her father had deserted her. Her aunt and uncle found her too difficult to handle. She had a bad disposition, a violent temper, stemming in part from eyes

afflicted with painful trachoma. She had been put in the poorhouse because no one wanted her. She was such a wild one that at times she had to be tied down.

But there was another resident named Maggie who cared for Annie. Maggie talked to her, fed her, even though Annie would throw her food on the floor, cursing and rebelling with every ounce of her being. But Maggie was a Christian and out of her convictions she was determined to love this dirty, unkempt, spiteful, unloving little girl. It wasn't easy, but slowly it got through to Annie that she was not the only who was suffering. Maggie also had been abandoned. And gradually Annie began to respond.

Maggie told her about a school for the blind and Annie began to beg to be sent there, and finally, consent was given and she went to the Perkins Institute. After a series of operations her sight was partially restored. She was able to finish her schooling and graduate at age twenty. Having been blind so long she told the director of Perkins that she wanted to work with blind and difficult children. They found a little girl seven years old in Alabama who was blind and deaf from the age of two. So, Annie Sullivan went to Tuscomb, Alabama to unlock the door of Helen Keller's dark prison and to set her free.

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Being a Christian will, at times, mean that we step out of our comfort zones. Being a Christian means that we harness our hope to make a better future. That will mean that we have given of ourselves. Our reward will be that we enter our master's joy.

Text: **Matthew 25:14–30** (NRSV)

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents,^f to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His

^f A talent was worth more than fifteen years' wages of a laborer#

master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

²² And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’

²⁶ But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?’ ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹ For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Mt 25:14–30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.