

Count Your Blessings, Count Your “Talents”

Թուէ Օրհնութիւններդ եւ Տաղանդներդ

Matthew 25:14-30

How can I be thankful in these days? There are so many challenging issues starting from the US to all over the world. Inflation, supply chain blockage, numerous social challenges, the influence of social media on the youth, Covid-19, the situation in the Middle East, Armenia, and Artsakh, even last week we lost 14 soldiers and land from Armenia... to name only a few.

How about church attendance, Covid-related and vaccination issues that divide people... and more!

Some also pointing to End Times, and that we have are living in the last days. End Times. No one knows about End Times. Even Jesus said the Son of Man would come back like a thief. Do I see an escalation of the signs of End Times? Yes and no. There were other times in history when people speculated that they lived in the End Times. So how do we live our daily life when we know one day Jesus will come back?

Here is a wise saying:

**“Live as though Jesus is coming back today;
plan as though he is not coming back for a hundred years.”¹**

This is a wise saying. We should be ready for the return of Jesus anytime. Which means we should never stop from investing in the Kingdom of God. NEVER. NEVER...

I myself get discouraged. Sunday afternoons I think about the church service, the sermon, who was there, who was not there, what can I do, where is my congregation, what are their needs, how can I serve them, and so on...

Then I stop and say, this is God’s work, and I am only an instrument... Nerses, keep investing and serving... Keep counting what God gave you, be thankful, and keep investing...

Lest us examine today’s passage.

Matthew Chapter 25 is almost the at end of the gospel, and it is all about the **Kingdom of God**. (*Chapter 26 starts with the plot to arrest Jesus.*)

Chapter 25 begins with the Parable of the Ten Virgins, (**to be READY** anytime for the coming of Jesus the groom);

Then the Parable of the Talents (**to be RESPONSIBLE, productive**), we will discuss today);

Then the metaphor of the sheep and goats (**to be ACCOUNTABLE**; there is a judgment day).

We all are invited to be in the Kingdom of God, **to be ready** for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, **to be responsible** and **productive** and not lazy, and to be **accountable** for what we do.

let us read the passage:

“For it will be like **a man** going on a journey, who called his **servants** and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to **each according to his ability**. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ **Now after a long time the master of those servants** came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ 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.’ ²¹ 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.’ ²² 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.’ ²³ 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.’ ²⁴ 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, 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 answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (Matthew 25:14-30 ESV)

We read in this parable about the **Man** (v14), the **Master** (v19) entrusting his servants with “talents” to be invested in the field. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus told a similar parable about “the **Nobleman**” who entrusted “**minas**” to his servants.

-What is a talent?

“One talent equaled 6,000 denarii (one denarius was the equivalent of a day’s wages for a common laborer). The talent was thus analogous to the modern million.”²

-What is the meaning of a talent for them and for us?

The “talents” probably symbolize personal gifts and abilities... and they are valuable (each talent is worth one million).

Not everyone receives the same amount, “**each according to his ability.**”

Paul also writes similar thoughts:

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:6-8 ESV)

“In common usage today ‘talents’ often refer to the natural endowments of a person... The talents symbolize the giftedness that is bestowed on each person who is **graced with kingdom life** and with how we use our gifts in the service of the kingdom (1 Cor. 12:7).³

Jesus was furious with the Pharisees and the Israelites who were called to be light to the nations. God gave them **the Law of Moses** and the **Temple**. Those were signs of God’s presence in their lives. Instead of being light to the nations, they kept the “light” to themselves; they buried it in the ground.

Let us return to the parable:

One received five talents, the other two, and the other one.

The first two **invested** what they received, while the one who got one talent hid it and did nothing.

After a long time, the Master came back. He rewarded the ones who invested the talents but punished the one who did nothing.

He rewarded the ones who invested.

God gave us those talents whether **spiritual or material** to be invested. And as you read the parable, you see that **it never comes to an end**. The ones who were not lazy were rewarded with entrusted with MORE to INVEST!

“You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much I will set you over much” (vs 21 ESV).

Keep serving, keep investing, keep putting the seeds of the Gospel in the Kingdom go God.

The one who did not invest found some excuses: **“I knew you to be a hard man...”**
“I was afraid...”

This man was called a **wicked man**.

Please notice his attitude toward his master.

Unfortunately, some people see God is mean, unconcerned, judgmental, don't care; God does not love me; God gave me one talent; why don't I have the other person's talent?

This is wrong attitude towards God who has *Hesed* toward us, God of mercy and love. They use this as excuse not to invest....

What are you afraid of?

Do you feel weak and unable? That is fine, God will work through our weakness.

Paul says this in his writings: **My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** (2 Cor 12:9 ESV)

Serving the Lord is a blessing.

It is an opportunity.

Our Harvest Banquet theme was “Count your Blessings.”

This week is Thanksgiving week. What are you thankful for?

We just hosted the AMAA's 102nd Annual Meeting in our church. I was astonished how God blessed us in different ways. Hearing reports from all over the world was inspiring. Even though we all live in the most challenging days, yet God is doing His work in among us. Amazing, just amazing!

Every time I read this parable, **I get challenged to evaluate myself.**

- Am I investing whatever was given to me?
 - Is my investment glorifying God?
 - Am I seeking success, or faithfully honoring the Lord Jesus Christ?
- Evaluate yourself, both individually and collectively.

The answer is in the parable.

“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much I will set you over much” (vs 21 ESV).

There is no word about being **successful**; the emphasis is on being **faithful** to God. **The emphasis is not about impressing God or people**; it is about loyal obedience to the Master.

“Put the seeds... put the seeds... plan, pray, invest, move forward...put the seeds... keep investing, keep praying, keep trusting that this is His work not mine. I am just His instrument.”

I started the message by asking this question:

How can I be thankful in these days?

Keep serving faithfully and “Count your blessing and name them one by one.”

Illustration: I want to finish with an encouraging story from the former church where Sevan and I served. Many tragedies hit the Armenian Evang. Emmanuel Church of Beirut after we left. It is located in a very modest neighborhood. The church school was closed and merged with another school. Closing the school was painful, but tragedy hit the church again when they lost their 40-year-old pastor Badveli Sevag Trashian due to a sudden heart attack. Can you imagine the situation in this church?

Nothing stopped the members from serving and worshiping. They lost their pastor, but they did not lose their zeal to serve the Lord. They used all kind of means to continue their service. Lay people got involved, guest pastors stepped in, even from the US many people stepped in to lead Bible studies on Zoom. A few weeks ago I heard that two young people, **George and Alin** decided to go into fulltime ministry. Alin is a beloved teacher in a school alongside her wholehearted service at the church. She quit her job and moved to the seminary to study Christian Education. George will finish his studies majoring in Math at the American University of Beirut and move to the seminary to become a pastor. It is amazing.

It is amazing how after the death of pastor Sevag, the planted seeds gave fruit.

I want to confess you one of my weaknesses. When I examine as your senior pastor our ministries and find out we have few coming, I get discouraged. Instead, I should focus on the ministry of Jesus as my example.

“The final judgment is not the greatness of our public ministry, but the ministry that flows from the humility of Jesus’ own heart for the needy among us.”⁴

“Remember where this parable occurs. It comes near the end of a story which is about to reach its great climax; and that climax comes when the **Son of Man** ‘gives his life as a ransom for many’ (20.28). When Jesus speaks of someone being thrown into the darkness outside, where people weep and grind their teeth, we must never forget that he was himself on the way into the darkness, where even he would sense himself abandoned by God (27.45–46).⁵

Let us approach the Table.

1. Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary, the Gospel of Matthew* p 816
2. Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary, NT vol. 33B*, p. 735
3. Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary, the Gospel of Matthew* p 820
4. *ibid* p 822
5. N.T. Wright, *Matthew For Everyone Part two* P 139