Text: Matthew 25:14-30

**Introduction**

I know it isn’t everybody’s humor, and it may be a personal failing, but I’ve always had a bit of a sweet tooth for gallows humor. It comes with being a Cubs fan before 2016 and maybe returning after Suzuki’s dropped catch this year, but Arizona benefitted greatly from that drop. There are a couple of internet jokes in the gallow humor range about news coverage. One from the crime press and the other from the financial. Every time there is a mass shooting, the narrative that the papers wish to tell is about legal gun control. But buried in about paragraph 40 of all these stories is inevitably “the shooter was known to the FBI or local law enforcement.” In almost all of the shootings, people had already reported the shooter to police. “Hey, that guy is a little off, you should watch him.” The gallows joke is an entire classroom looking at Bart Simpson and demanding “Say the words.” And poor Bart having to admit, “the shooter was known to the police.” And the entire preferred narrative is destroyed. Because the real story is not that we need new laws, but that current ones weren’t enforced, or knowledge acted upon.

The financial press has a less serious but similar story. They want to tell a rags to riches story. They want to profile a person who by their own effort has saved $1M by age 25 or built a million dollar business by 30. Or by the power of budgeting is able to live on some impossibly low income. And if they can do it, so can you. But again, down at the bottom of the article you eventually learn that the person being profiled who has 1M by 25 inherited $850K. Or the guy living on a $25K income also have a $5M trust fund. Or the million dollar business CEO by 30 was made VP of Dad’s firm at 27. The financial press is dishonest enough that pointing these things out is often left to others.

For example, it crosses with local sports, Matt Ishbia, Sun’s owner. The way the story has been told is scrappy Michigan State walk-on graduates college, starts and grows billion dollar mortgage business, buys the Suns. What is typically left out is that the mortgage business which he did help grow to substantial size, was started by his Dad in 1986. Matt joined in 2003 when it had established itself as a dominant state and local provider. By the time he took over daily control in 2013 it was already a national behemoth. Now he had something to do with that. I’m not taking that away. But most of us start with something given, even if the only thing we start with is breathing. And skipping that is skipping the grace.

**Text**

There is another Bible verse that I’ve often thought was the key to today’s parable or should be connected to it. From Luke 16:11-12, “If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?” Jesus’ rhetorical questions of course demand the answer, nobody. If you can’t manage a small thing, nobody is going to give you a bigger thing. And yes the gallows humor would shout out the Peter principle at this point, but Jesus’ is talking about His Father. And ultimately Jesus is talking about life itself. The unrighteous wealth is this sinful life. If we can’t be faithful in this life which is time limited, who is going to give you eternal life? If you can’t be faithful on borrowed time, who is going to give you unlimited?

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.” The man is always intending to come back and collect. What he gives to the servants isn’t theirs, but they do have absolute discretion in how they use it. And there are two important things to note in Matthew’s telling about what is given. They are all given a minimum of a talent. The best translation today would probably be something like 5 million dollars. To one he gave 5 million, to another 10 and to another 25 million. These are large numbers. What is given in not small. The second thing to notice is that difference – “to each according to his ability.” Nobody is given more than they can handle, but also nobody is given too little such that they are set up for failure. The question is what do you do with what is given?

**Christology**

Now we have to ask what exactly is given? What are the talents? And I think the answer is simply life. Both this life that we are now living, and the promise of eternal life. Both of these are pure gift. This life is the gift of the creation of the Father through the son. The promise of eternal life is the welcoming of the Father because of the deeds of the son. We didn’t create ourselves. We don’t know when our lives will end. We have no ability to add even a single day. We can subtract. We can destroy. We can fritter away. We often turn life into nothing or worse. But create life itself. That is always a pure gift.

This life, even with all its struggles, is a gift of immense worth. And the promise of eternal life is even more. Everything that we do comes from that grace alone.

**Moral**

And while there are differences in the amounts given, the only difference that is meaningful is the attitude of the recipient toward the gift and the giver. The one given 5 talents at once – immediately – with haste – went and invested that life. The one with 2 likewise. But the one with 1 talent went and dug in the ground and buried it.

The first two are not fully fleshed out. They simply are faithful with what has been given. And both receive exactly the same reward. The acclamation of the Father, “well done good and faithful servant.” What that have brought to give back – the original talents and anything they earned – are left with them and in fact even more is given. “You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much.” And they are invited “into the joy of your Master.” I have often asked why a servant who was faithful but unlucky wasn’t included. Master, I’m sorry, but my investments came to nothing. But I don’t think the response would have been different. Because the question is one of faith. Who do you think God is?

The servant who had been given a single talent – this single life – comes forward and makes it clear. “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.” That man did not understand that Kingdom. Everything that is, is what God has sown. And the seed has been scattered to the wind. As in the parable of the sower. Far from being a hard man, the Father scans the distance with soft eyes looking daily for the prodigal’s return. He begs the older son to come into the feast. There is always more than enough grace. Even the single talent is 5 million – a full life. This servant completely misjudges the Father. Lacks faith in God in how he has revealed himself in the son.

And we are judged by the ruler we use.

**Eschatological**

Do we judge with grace and faith? “For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance.” Treat this life and all that comes from it as a gift? More will be given. Have faith that the promises of God are sound. You will have more than you can imagine – true riches, that which is your own – eternal life. Enter into the joy.

Do we judge with harshness and distrust? “But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” Go and bury this life and all you have done is lose it.

It is something of a side note, I don’t know if anyone read Ayan Hirsi Ali’s explanation of her conversion to Christianity. Some complained that it didn’t sound like a true conversion as it didn’t talk about the truth of things like the resurrection, but merely that she liked civilization and didn’t think her former atheism or anything else could sustain it absent the faith. But I think that might be akin to something that Father says here to this servant who lacked faith. “You ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.” Maybe we are a bruised reed or a smoldering wick. Maybe the immediate reaction of the first servant is just beyond us. But we can still see that Christ is better, and we can invest what we have been given with the bankers.

**Conclusion**

We have all been given this life. And it has come from the grace of God. We have been given the promise of eternal life. That through the grace of Christ and the cross. God have revealed himself and his character in the fullness of his grace.

What is our response?

With the measure you use, it is measured to you.

Do not be afraid to invest this life by the measure of grace and faith.