

November 13 - The Parable of the Talents - Matthew 25:14

The Parable of the Talents reminds us that the Lord has blessed us with talents – gifts and abilities. And apparently He expects us to use them and thereby multiply them. He wants a return on his investment in each one of us.

So step out in faith. Use your abilities to serve, trusting in His promises.

In our Sunday class we've been studying Timothy Keller's "*The Reason for God*". The first session dealt with a problem: Some people are outside the church because they have difficulty believing in God. It seems like too big a leap for them.

Paraphrasing one of the doubters: "My scientific training makes it difficult for me to accept the teachings of Christianity. I need some evidence on which to base my faith. I live in a world of rational deduction. I see this, and it tells me that this is true. I just need some evidence for God."

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But maybe the problem is approaching the subject of faith in God from an academic point of view – as something to be discussed and argued about. Show me the evidence.

That wasn't Jesus' approach when he preached. He didn't give people extended arguments for believing. Rather, he said "*Follow me – and find out for yourself whether what I'm teaching is true.*"

Maybe the only way to find out whether Christianity is true is by trying it out. The evidence is the effect it has on lives.

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One Sunday a Bishop visited a thriving suburban church. After the service he was visiting with various people at the coffee hour. A man introduced himself. He was a distinguished trial lawyer -- and a life-long member of that congregation. The bishop remarked that it was a lovely service, and he could see why the man was an active member of that congregation.

But the member responded, "I don't really get much out of the service. I come here for other reasons."

"Really? Why are you here?"

And he said that the center of his faith was a program that had been going on in the church for many years. On Saturday mornings, a small group from the church drives into the heart of the inner-city. There they set up shop handing out food.

"When we first started going down there, we would pull up on the side of the street and immediately a crowd of street people would gather. We would hand out our stuff, wish them well, and then head back home. But as the weeks passed, we would linger. We engaged people in conversation. Some of those people have become my friends. We talked whatever they want to talk about."

What was there about that experience that strengthened his faith?

He responded, "I look upon that gathering down on the sidewalk on Saturday as a kind of preview of the promises of God. God says that one day there won't be any crying, sorrow, or hunger anymore."

“Someday there won’t be social and economic depravations and divisions. One day we will all be together. When I talk to those guys, I feel a deep kinship with them. Our differences melt. They don’t know that I am a successful attorney. They just know me as a guy that they look forward to having coffee with on a Saturday.

“And I don’t know them as people who have a horribly difficult life. We are just all there together. It’s like I am standing on a corner of heaven. It’s like I get a glimpse, just for a couple of hours on a Saturday, of the way it’s going to one day be forever. In those two hours, I really get the encouragement that the ultimate promises of God are actually true.”

Remember the parable of the talents? That lawyer was using his talents – his time and money – to provide food to the homeless. Then, like those servants in the parable of the talents, he multiplied his talent – increased its value. As a lawyer, naturally he had the ability to converse with and relate to all kinds of clients. On Saturday mornings he discovered he could use that gift in a different way. He could talk with homeless men as his equals – just hang out with them. And in doing so he respected their worth as human beings and children of the heavenly Father. Thus he fed them spiritually as well as materially.

Later we’ll sing the old gospel hymn – *“Standing on the Promises of God.”* Down on that street corner, suddenly the Christian faith is no longer some kind of intellectual dilemma. One gets some evidence. Sure, it is not hard evidence, and it is not really “proof” that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And yet, one sees the promises of God start to become undeniable reality. Sometimes, what you have to do with the promises of God is not to analyze or argue them, but simply to stand on them and to lean toward them and that’s enough. God’s promises that gradually unfold in our life -- promises that become for us reassuring confirmation that our faith is not in vain.

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A brand-new storefront church was begun by an older, established congregation in an effort to show radical hospitality to a wider range of people than they had been able to reach previously. They asked a dozen or so couples in the old congregation to give at least a year in an effort to start a new congregation -- to offer their gifts and talents in that new church – and thereby, like the servants in the parable, to increase them – to offer the master a return on his investment.

One of the most remarkable moments occurred one Sunday when the Pastor was giving the announcements. She mentioned a number of activities that were going on at the church that week, including the meetings of AA, CA, ALATEEN, and other support groups for those in addiction. Then she blurted out, *“How many of you are addicted to drugs or alcohol? Let’s see the hands.”*

About 20 people raised their hands.

“Keep your hands up. Now I know that some of you here this morning have trouble believing in some of the miracles in the Bible. You wonder how in the world somebody could be miraculously healed by Jesus. You would like more evidence, more proof.

“Well, here is your proof! You need evidence? Well, just look at the people holding up their hands right now. They are God’s gift to you, giving you just the evidence that you

need to believe. Every person holding up his or her hands right now is living, breathing proof that God is real, that God is good, and that God is still able to work wonders among us.”

A dramatic confirmation that the promises of God are indeed true and certain. In explaining AA step 3 – “*turn our will and lives over to the care of God*” – the book says “*This is the way to a faith that works.*”

You want evidence that Christianity is true?

It’s a faith that works.

But you have to work your faith to find out that it is true.

You have to rely on God’s promises to learn for yourself that they are trustworthy.

It is the nature of the Christian life to always live as those who lean toward the future in hopefulness and live in the present as those who have received the promises.

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In just a moment you will be invited to come forward to the Lord’s table. You will be given just a bit of bread and just a sip of wine -- not really a full meal. It is a foretaste -- a kind of first installment on the complete promises of God.

One day we shall all sit down together, at the great banquet table of the Lord at *the feast of victory for our God*. People shall find the fulfillment that only God can give. The promises of God will be totally fulfilled. Until that day, we gather in church, we have a sip of wine, we have just a bit of bread, and yet, this is for us enough, our way that we lean into the promises. Here at this table, with just a sip of wine and bit of bread, we find nourishment enough to keep going, standing on the promises of God.

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We who follow Christ have one enormous, uncountable gift - Jesus Christ. The only catch with this gift is that the only way to keep it is to give it away. Then it comes back multiplied, in the form of others who love Jesus with us.

Jesus called us in – and now he sends us out – gives us love to tell and love to share, so as the next hymn says *Let us talents and tongues employ*.