

We are going to read a parable from Jesus that speaks both of the future and how we live now. I want to take it from an angle you may not have considered as we seek to live the life we have to the fullest. My hope is that you see God is generous toward you. And that His generosity would drive you to freely live the life He has given you.

In Matthew 25.14-30, Jesus discusses what the future will be like. And, the future is not merely something yet to come but influences how we live now.

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.” vv.14-18

The parable begins with a wealthy landowner. We can know a bit about the character of the landowner based on his actions. This landowner was generous - he entrusted what he had to his servants. And the landowner was good - he wanted his servants to experience something good. You can see this through his assignment of bags of gold according to their abilities. Perhaps you know, for example, what it’s like to be in a job in which you are under-utilized or overwhelmed. The best role is one where your strengths are challenged to grow. In other words, a job according to your abilities. Here’s what happens next.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ ‘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!’ ‘The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’ ‘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!’” vv.19-23

The landowner returned to settle accounts, which tells us there was an expectation on how the servants would act while he was away. You can see the heart of the landowner in his celebration. They were faithful in a few things so that they would be given more. The joy of the landowner was, “I have more for you!” He wanted to give even greater things to

these workers. These first two workers understood the character of the landowner that way. And because they did, they acted with freedom.

At this point, it’s important for you to know there is another layer to this story. When Jesus told parables, He used characters, scenes, and dialogue to picture how God works. To tell a story about a master who owns much and entrusts what He has to His servants, and, though seemingly absent now, will return, is to tell the story of God. To tell the story of a gracious and good landowner - who has more for His people - is to tell the story of God.

This “more” underlines what is the central part of the parable - the third servant’s statement.

“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. v.24

When faced with the returning master, the third servant said something surprising and strange: “I knew you were a [harsh/cruel] man.” Not only harsh but also unjust - to harvest where you did not sow is a way of saying, “You take what you want.” Here’s the problem with this description: nothing of landowner’s actions in the story tells us this. Everything tells us the landowner was absurdly generous, and he gave for the good of his workers. Somewhere along the way, the third servant decided the landowner couldn’t be trusted. Watch where this leads.

So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ v.25

The third worker was afraid, and so he hid the gold. It’s as if the worker said to himself, “If he is harsh and unjust, takes everything he can get his hands on, just think how mad he’ll be if I lose what he’s given to me.” And what did this fear lead to? Hiding.

For many of us, we follow the path of the third worker. We build false narratives - large and small - about who God is. Maybe life didn’t turn out like you hoped - not what you planned, and you blame God. Maybe you feel like you tried to trust Him and you feel disappointed. Maybe you had a negative experience with a parent/boss/authority figure, and you transferred that image to God. Maybe religious people depicted God as someone He’s not, and you don’t know any different. Maybe you found yourself viewing God as One eager to exact revenge on your every misstep, rather than One who joyfully and freely is generous to you.

We’re afraid, so we hide. This goes back to the beginning of the human experience. Adam and Eve in the Garden were told a lie about God from the enemy. The lie was this: God is restrictive, and He withholds good from them. It was an attack on God’s generosity and integrity. They

believed the lie, and everything changed for them and us still today. The lie plays out in a powerful image in Genesis 3:10. After Adam and Eve chose the path of a false narrative, God appeared in the garden. Adam and Eve were out of sight, and God asked, "Where are you?" It is one of the most powerful questions ever posed. It was not a question of location but identity. And Adam responded with these words, "I was afraid...so I hid." These same words in English are in our story of the third servant. Notice, they believed God wasn't for their good. So, "Where are you?" was a threat to Adam, rather than an invitation. You can put yourself in the Garden or the story of the third servant by asking yourself this question: If God said, "Where are you?" to you today, would you run toward Him or from Him?

The third servant believed a lie about the character of the landowner, which drove his hiding - his lack of action.

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. "So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' v.26-30

The landowner was angry, but why was He angry? The landowner was not angry because of a certain amount of money. He would have been happy with a small amount of interest. The third worker did not lose any of his money. Don't read the landowner as an insecure, frugal, merciless bookkeeper, looking for a certain percentage return. The judgment - settling of accounts - was made on their faith-action, not the result of their faith-action.

So, why was the landowner angry? He was angry because the third servant didn't do anything. He stopped living. You can hear it in the statement (paraphrased), "Even if I were who you thought, the least you could have done is...something." The most tragic moment in this entire story is imaging the third worker going out to a field with a shovel in hand and digging a hole. He probably did this at night, so no one would see and steal, and so that no one would see his shame. He covered the hole and walked burdened into the dark, empty night. There's nothing in this action that represents the joy the landowner wanted for him.

Fear leads to hiding. Fear hands us shovels to retreat into the night of insecurity and shame, to dig holes to protect ourselves. We are more comfortable with a shovel than taking a risk to believe God is generous toward us. His generosity means that we can freely use what we have

for good. Yes, this is a story about how the third servant did nothing with his bag of gold. But it's vitally important to understand why he did not act. The difference between the first two workers and third is how they viewed their master.

Hearing the third servant hid rather than lived, the landowner said to throw him outside. Fear leads to hiding, and hiding leads to separation. Jesus pictures a future in which people who have rejected God, find themselves separated from Him. This drives an urgency in Jesus' teaching. There is a better way. Our heavenly Father has a better invitation.

In Luke 15, Jesus told the story of two sons who misunderstood their father. The older son came home from work one day to find a raging party, celebrating the return of his younger brother. Imagine the elder son, exhausted and weary from work, indignant that his hard work - doing what "should" be done - seemingly didn't count enough for celebration. That is how he understood his father - demanding, exacting, grace-less, a merciless bookkeeper. His father responded with one of the most stunning statements in all of Jesus' teaching. "You are always with me, and everything I have is yours." Work, for the older son, was his effort to be accepted by his father. Tragically, he didn't realize his father's generosity and goodness was available to him every day.

John, the disciple of Jesus, wrote about how Jesus transforms fear. "Perfect [or, complete] love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). He went on to say that fear involves anticipated punishment. Jesus bore the punishment that we deserved so you could get the freedom.

Fear leads to hiding. Hiding leads to separation. But Jesus writes a new narrative of grace that leads to freedom. The fear that we're not acceptable to God is driven out by grace that says you're more loved than you ever thought.

Maybe a question for you is this, "Where are you hiding?" Maybe there is a relationship with someone in which you have believed something about them that isn't true. So, you hide and build the distance between the two of you. Grace can change the narrative.

Maybe the relationship with the most significant gap is with God. Maybe you have lost the knowledge of His generosity towards you. Maybe you couldn't imagine that He is good and everything He has is available to you.

Reflect on how you view God, and hear His response back to you, "Everything I have is yours." God has given you an abundant life to live. Fear puts a shovel in your hands, but His grace opens your hands to receive the more that God has for you.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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