

**Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30**

25:14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them;  
25:15 to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.  
25:16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents.  
25:17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents.  
25:18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.  
25:19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.  
25:20 Then 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.'  
25:21 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.'  
25:22 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.'  
25:23 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.'  
25:24 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;  
25:25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'  
25:26 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? 25:27 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.  
25:28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents.  
25:29 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.  
25:30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

**Proclamation of the Word**

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I am Servant #3, the one banished from the presence of my Master, the boss. Man, I really messed up. And I thought I was doing exactly what I needed to do. I feel like I have gotten a bad rap. I wanted to tell you my side of the story.

When the owner was about to leave to go on an extended business trip, he called the three of us into his office. While he was away, he told us, he was leaving us in charge of his money. At first, I was surprised that I was included. Mathias and Jacob were always his favorites. I was low man on the totem pole- just a worker bee. Yeah, I have been called down for showing up late for work, but I like to stay up late and surf the net. Sure, I have botched a few jobs, costing the company for my mistakes.

I just always messed things up. My teachers never expected much out of me, and I never disappointed them. I was always glad to just pass the class. Out of all my brothers and sisters, mom and dad never expected much out of me. Kevin was the smart one, Elizabeth was always the athlete. I was just John, Child #3. Now I am Servant #3. They called me the immature one, the lazy one.

That is why I was shocked when the owner called me into his office and gave me some of his for which money to be responsible. I mean I know it wasn't as much as he gave Mathias and Jacob, but it was a lot to me. 1 Talent is equal to 15 years' salary. Since I make \$40,000 a year that amount is \$600,000...\$600,000!!!

I did not know what to do at first! I was shocked that the Owner entrusted me with anything to take care of. Wow! I had never been given that kind of responsibility before. No one ever expected much out of me, so I really thought about what I should do with the sum of money. I was afraid of losing even a penny. If I were to lose it, I could only imagine what the owner might do to me when he returned. He would surely fire me, then I'd really be up the creek. He is such a harsh, demanding head honcho.

I was really tempted to pay off the mortgage and buy a sweet new ride. Gosh, with that kind of cash, I could fly to Tahiti and quit work for awhile. I get so tired of going to work every day and being bossed around. Then I remembered, the bill collectors who keep calling, and I guess if I were going to use the money for myself, I would pay off all my debts first. I have really racked up some credit card debt. But then I remembered that Owner saying, it was all his money, not mine to spend selfishly. And I was afraid that the owner would throw me in jail for taking his money and using it all on myself.

I thought about investing it thinking that might really impress him. But the market has been on such a roller coaster ride, that I was afraid to take the risk. I was afraid to lose any of the money and be accused of messing up again. That would just solidify in people's minds, that I cannot be trusted.

Then I heard that Clemson Community Care and the Free Medical Clinic had been covered up with folks out of work, uninsured, and sick. When people found out I had some of the owner's money, they kept knocking on my door and asking for help. If I gave it away, I would have nothing to show the owner when he got back. Sure it would help people, keep their bellies full, and keep them from freezing on a cold night. But what if they were just being lazy or had too many children to feed? The owner might get mad at me for throwing money away. So I was afraid to give it to people that might be drunks or who work the system.

Then, I had my best idea. I would take that \$600,000 and put it in a safe deposit box down at the bank. That way nothing would happen to it. It would be exactly the way he had left it. That way if my house caught on fire, I would not lose it. He would not be able to punish me for using it on myself. And he would not think I squandered it on poor people who could not handle money. And he couldn't say I had gambled it away in the stock market. I would prove to him that I would take care of it until he got back. So I carefully wrapped up all those bills in a bag and locked it up safe and sound. I thought that is what respectable people did. I thought that would make the owner proud.

I was shocked when the owner came back. Mathias had taken his 3 million and grown it to 6 million. Jacob had taken his 1.2 million and turned it in to 2.4 million. My amount was exactly the way it was in the beginning- \$600,000- nothing had changed. No one's life was changed. It made no difference to anyone in the end except maybe the bank. I actually lost money, because I had to pay them a fee for the safe deposit box!!!

I guess my biggest mistake was in misjudging the owner. I thought he would punish me and not want me to take risks with what belongs to him. I thought I knew him, but I did not. He had given us what belong to him to take care of it. I thought that meant being safe and protective. I was so afraid to mess up that I hunkered down. I mean, look at what is happening in Greece. I thought being respectable was about risk management. I held on tight to what I had. I played it safe. I guess that famous Christian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was right when he said that the sin of respectable people is to run away from responsibility and to do nothing. He should know, in World War II and the decade leading up to the holocaust, lots of good God-fearing Christians did just that, nothing. They wanted to take no responsibility. I thought I was doing the respectable thing, but I discovered that responsibility requires taking risks and running the business the same way the owner did. The

owner had taken a risk on me, on us. He had trusted us and wanted us to do great things with what belonged to him.

What I realize is that the Master's enterprise, of which you and I are shareholders, is about taking risks and generosity, not playing it safe.

He was so impressed with Mathias and Jacob, how their money multiplied and accomplished the mission. The owner went on and on about their initiative, their gumption, and their trust that if the Holy Spirit was working in them, great things could happen. I was so shocked that the owner had been so generous with me, that I did not realize, he wanted me to live the same way.

Do you know what the owner said to Mathias and Jacob? It hurts to remember.

He said, "Good work! You did your job well. From now on, you will be my partner." They had doubled what the owner gave them to use, you see.

But when I saw the Owner, I said, "I know you have high standards and hate carelessness, you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I would disappoint you, so I hid it in a safe place. Here it is; every last cent."

He replied, "That's a terrible way to live. If you knew I wanted your best, why did you do less than the least? You could have at least given it to the bankers to use. At least you would have made a little interest. But this did no one any good."

Once again, I had messed up. I lived up to my reputation as a "do nothing." I did not really know the owner well enough to know that he was a generous, self-giving master that would give his right arm or even his life for us. If I had understood that, I would have held nothing back.

I missed the point completely. The Owner intends us to grow the Kingdom business and bear fruit. Like Thornton Wilder wrote, "Money is like manure, it is meant to spread around and make young things grow." When we know the grace of the owner, we will make risky investments for the owner's business. When we are connected to the true Vine, we will grow good fruit. Generosity and grace grow good things. Fear makes us small and ineffective.

Do you know what happened to Mathias and Jacob? The owner knew he could trust them, so he gave them more responsibility. The owner made them full business partners. And they have received the best gift ever because of that...they entered into the JOY, the JOY of living in the Master's favor and the JOY of a life of generosity, not fear.

It is too late for me, but it is not too late for you. If you know and trust this generous Master, you too can know the joy of giving and making risky investments for the sake of the Master's business. I know that now. I just needed to let you know.

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