

St. Augustine's Sermons

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The Text: Matthew 25:14-30:

The Parable of the Talents

14 "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.'

Introduction:

The movie *Hoosiers* tells the Cinderella story of a small-town Indiana high school basketball team that wins the state championship. One important character, an alcoholic named Shooter, played by Dennis Hopper, has failed at most things in his life—but he has an extraordinary knowledge of and passion for the game of basketball.

The coach, Norman Dale, played by Gene Hackman, works with Shooter to give him a second chance in life. He asks Shooter to be his assistant coach, and soon Shooter is on the bench.

The little-known Hickory High School basketball team is starting to experience winning ways when, during a pivotal game, the coach decides to get himself thrown out. He pulls the referee aside and says, "Take me out of the game." The ref doesn't know what the coach is up to, but he tosses him from the game.

Shooter is terrified. A few scenes earlier, after another drinking binge, Shooter promised the coach he'd stay sober and remain as the assistant on one condition: "You've got to give me your *word*," said Shooter, "that you will *not* be kicked out of no games!" There had been an earlier game where Dale had been kicked out, and Shooter had to take over behind the bench in that match. He had been terrified.

The end of the game is near, and the score is tied. The Hickory players call a time out. In the team huddle, all eyes are on Shooter, including his son's, who never thought his dad should be in this position in the first place. Shooter is paralyzed by fear. He can't speak. Finally, his son says, "You reckon number four will put up their last shot, Dad?" That seems to jump-start Shooter, and he haltingly calls a play. The team goes back on the floor and begins to execute it when Shooter calls another time out.

Now he is completely engaged in the game, and his knowledge and passion for basketball have overtaken his fear. He lays out the strategy for the next play with confidence: "All right, now listen to me. This is the last shot that we got. All right? We're gonna run the picket fence at 'em. Merle, you're the swing man. Jimmy, you're solo right. All right, Merle should be open swinging around the end of that fence. Now boys, don't get caught watchin' that paint dry!"

The players are with him. They walk back onto the floor, run the play to perfection, and sink the game-winning basket. Of course, Shooter and the players are deliriously happy. Amid the celebration, Shooter's son looks into his father's eyes and says, "You did good, Pop. You did real good."

A weak, shame-filled alcoholic did real good because the coach decided he was worth taking a risk on. In the same way, God sees our value and loves us enough to take a risk on us.

This scene is one that sets up what I am going to talk with you about today. A weak, shame-filled alcoholic did “real good” because the coach decided it was worth taking a risk on him. In the same way, God sees our sin and weaknesses, and even more importantly, sees our value. God loves us enough to take a risk on us. We are God’s investments.

The parable of the talents is not a story about the natural gifts and talents God gives us. Rather it is a story about how God places us in situations where he asks us to use our abilities for the good of the team. This is what Shooter learned from coaching the last few minutes of the game and this is, what I believe God, wants us to learn in the few minutes we have to consider the parable this morning.

Jesus tells us a story about a rich man who goes on a long journey and entrusts 5 talents to one servant, two talents to a second and one talent to a third. He entrusted the talents based on the abilities of each of the three servants. A talent is not a monetary unit but rather a weight. It would be equivalent to 65 pounds or around 32 kilograms. The precious metal weighed was usually silver. So here is a story where one servant was given 325 pounds in silver, another 130 pounds in silver and a third 65 pounds in silver. It is important to note that from the perspective of the story teller, the point is what each of the three does with what has been entrusted to them. The primary issue is not the weight of the silver given, but how the three use what they are given.

This parable teaches that God is working in our lives, providing opportunities for us to use our abilities in situations that he is helping to arrange. It is how we respond to those situations that matters. Do we, so to speak, capitalize on the opportunities we are given and thus allow ourselves to be stretched as we grow and mature; or do we cower in fear and worry and so squander the opportunities presented to us? This is the question that the parable invites each us to answer.

I would like you to see three things that this story is teaching us:

1. Ownership is God’s
2. Faithful management is ours
3. Accountability is coming

So let’ think of each of these ideas in turn:

1. Ownership is God’s.

The way Jesus tells the parable makes it clear that the talents do not belong to the servants, but to the landowner. The property is his but he has entrusted it into the hands of these three servants. It is clear that he is generous in what he is willing to share, and he is also trusting. He goes away for a long time and leaves the three to

decide how they will use what has been entrusted to them. They can choose to live wisely and conscientiously or foolishly.

This is so much what life is like is it not? We have many different and varying kinds of opportunities that come our way throughout our lives. Perhaps, the younger we are the more numerous the opportunities are as we are seeking to understand who we are as we find our way in the world. Remember from this parable, Jesus is teaching us that such opportunities come to us from God. This can be very helpful for all of us to remember, regardless of our age.

I think of my own life. There are certain areas in my make-up where my abilities are not good, like math and science. Needless to say opportunities in those areas were not forthcoming for me, because such situations would not be in keeping with my abilities. However the vocation that I do exercise has been entrusted to be by God because my abilities correspond with the gifts needed to be a pastor.

God is concerned with how we live the life we have been given. The Christian understands that our lives are not our own to do with as we please. Rather they have been given to us by God. Paul in 1 Corinthians put it this way: "Your life is not your own, therefore glorify God in your body" One of the ways we do this is by learning to make the most of the opportunities that we are given.

2. Faithful management is ours

If ownership is God's, the parable also teaches that faithful management is ours. There is a word that we use in English that clearly expresses this point in the parable. It is the word economy. This English word has a Greek root. The word in Greek is *oikonomos*. This is taken from two words: "*Oikos*", which is translated house. "*Nomos*" which means "to manage." Christians are to be economists whereby we manage the opportunities that God gives to us.

To be Christian economists in this sense means we are out of ownership and into management. It means that life is like a great house loaded with riches. The house belongs to Christ, but he has left us to manage his household.

In Romans 1, the Apostle Paul is clear about his charge from God. He uses three "I am" statements. "I am under obligation." "I am eager to preach." "I am not ashamed" (Romans 1:14-16). It is as if God had given Paul a great wealth that he was in turn to pass along to others.

There was an article in the New York Times of a college graduate who moved to the big city bent on making his fortune in banking. He was driving a very nice car, a graduation gift from his older brother.

One day as he was getting into his car, a poor inner city child of twelve stood admiring the car. "My brother gave it to me," the young banker explained.

The kid said, "I wish...." And immediately the banker thought he was going to say, "I wish I had a car like that!" But, no! The child said, "I wish I could be a brother like that!"

"Do you want a ride?" the banker asked.

"Wow! Sure I do," the lad said and got in. Soon the boy asked if he could stop in front of an old building while he ran upstairs. Thinking the boy was going to fetch a friend to gawk at his car, he was amazed when his young neighbor came down carrying his severely handicapped brother. "Just look at this car! Isn't it fine? Some day I'm going to buy you a car like this!"

Now that's biblical stewardship! Not how much of my money am I going to give God, but how much of God's money do I keep for myself? Not me, mine, I-focused, but God-and-others-focused. Here is an attitude that illustrates what it means to be managers.

When we get to heaven, Jesus won't ask how nice a car you drove, but did you use it to help others? He won't ask the square footage of your home; he'll ask you how your home was used to extend his love and hospitality to others. He won't ask your net worth; he'll ask about your generosity in helping others.

Stop and think for two minutes. Quick! Name the last three winners of the Vezina trophy. Name the past five Grey Cup Champions. Give the names of ten MPs and the last five best actor Oscar winners. You cannot, can you? However you can well recall the names of those who helped you when you were hospitalized for a week, those teachers who went the extra mile to get you through school that tough year, and those people in your life who extended kindness and care to you.

God, you see, has richly invested in you! Time, talent, money - it's all his! But to you he has entrusted a sum. And now he has strategically placed your life where you can express his love by your kindness in Christ-centered living.

3. Accountability is coming:

If ownership is God's, management is ours; the third thing we learn from this parable is accountability is coming. The text tells us the businessman returned and called in each of his employees to see what they'd done with his talents, and the reward for work well done was more work. But the punishment for lack of vision, laziness, and selfishness was that even what they had was taken away.

In every game there is a buzzer, a whistle, a finish line, a bell that rings signaling the end. Then winners and losers are announced. So will come a day in each of our lives. A trumpet will sound from on high. We will cease all commerce. We each shall stand

before the Lord, and we shall give account of our stewardship.

The text says some of us are given five talents, others two, some of us one. We're not all equally endowed. But a person shows who they are by what he or she does with the opportunities that are given to them.

In the parable, the five talent man told the businessman, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more." He was commended. The same with the two talent employee, and so on. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"

Ah, but one employee took his stewardship to the master and sourly complained, "I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground." Translation: "I resent your lordship over me. I'm into possession, not management. I'll work to put money into my pocket, but I won't do it for you!" In short, he rejected his boss. He rejected the entire concept of being an "oikonomis". Jesus called him "wicked," "slothful," and "cast him into outer darkness."

Wow! I'm not making this up! This is serious! Ownership belongs to God. Faithful use of opportunities belongs to us, and judgment day is coming.

Before I give an application, I want to remind you of this one thing about judgment day.

The New Testament proclaims that at some unforeseeable time in the future, God will ring down the final curtain on history, and there will come a Day on which all our days and all the judgments upon us and all our judgments upon each other will themselves be judged. The judge will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully.

This is the central theme of the season of Advent and it is in the light of this biblical truth that in the present we remember that ownership is God and management of opportunities is entrusted to us.

Conclusion:

Now I want to apply this particularly to Flynn and her friends. This is an age where you are trying to figure a lot of things out. Remember this. God has and will place before you opportunities to manage your life well. At present this finds particular application in your studies, friendships and extra-curricular activities.

Think about school with me for a minute. At times you may feel that there are subjects that you have to take that frustrate you and you find difficult. At the same time there are subjects in which you excel. At this age you are discovering and discerning your abilities and so you need to take a wide range of subjects to better see where these abilities lie. As you continue to mature, you will be given the opportunity

to develop those abilities where you do have gifting. This is something you are already discovering and it is fun to recognize where your abilities do allow you to be productive.

Therefore you can be economists by accepting your areas of weakness and making the most of those situations. Apply yourself to those subjects and interests where you do have abilities. In so doing you will be like the first two servants in the parable, taking the opportunities made available to you by increasing what has been entrusted to you.

In baptism as in the Parable of the Talents we affirm that Ownership is God's, management is ours and judgment is coming. May all who are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be Christian economists in how we live each and every day.