

A team of researchers from the University of Michigan and Yale studied how people in unglamorous jobs coped with their often devalued work. When the researchers tried to think of supposedly unrewarding jobs to study, they chose hospital janitors. But what they learned from their studies took them completely by surprise.

When the researchers interviewed the cleaning staff of a major hospital in the Midwest... they discovered that a certain subset of housekeepers didn't see themselves as part of the janitorial staff at all. ... They saw themselves as part of the professional staff... as part of the healing team. ... And that changed everything.

These people would get to know the patients and their families and would offer support in small but important ways: a box of Kleenex here... a glass of water there... or a word of encouragement. ... One housekeeper reported rearranging pictures on the walls of comatose patients... with the hope that a change of scenery might have some positive effect.

The researchers coined a term for what these special housekeepers brought to their job—"job crafting." Job crafting means that people take their existing job expectations—or job descriptions—and expand them to suit their desire to make a difference. ... Job crafters are those who do what's expected (because it's required)... and then find a way to add something new to their work. ... Something that delights. ... Something that benefits both the giver and the receiver.

Martin Luther King, Jr. speaking to students at Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia on October 26, 1967 told the kids:

If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.

But this is not our natural inclination... is it...?

Law professor and technology expert Tim Wu claims that there's an underestimated force that drives our daily lives—convenience. We want nearly everything about our lives to be convenient, efficient, and easy. Wu calls convenience "the most powerful force shaping our individual lives and our economies." He writes:

"Convenience decides everything." Convenience seems to make our decisions for us, trumping what we like to imagine are our true preferences. (I prefer to brew my coffee, but instant is so convenient I hardly ever do what I "prefer.") Easy is better, easiest is best.

With its promise of smooth... effortless efficiency... it can become a constraint on what we are willing to do... and thus in a subtle way it can enslave us ... When we let convenience decide everything... we surrender too much. We surrender the Lordship of Christ in our lives.

Is convenience King in your life – or is Christ? This is the question... among several others that our passage this morning forces us to ask. ... Now that Christ has saved you... are you job crafting in His church? Are you diligent with the abilities He has gifted to you?

We are near the end of the Olivet Discourse in our study through Matthew's gospel. As Jesus concludes this discussion with His disciples about the end times... He prepares all of us for it... by telling us what we are to be doing... IN THE MEANTIME... as we wait for His return to earth. Jesus

does this by telling a series of parables. Last week we looked at the Parable of the Foolish Bridesmaids... who were not prepared for the Bridegrooms return. Following his illustration describing the wise and foolish bridesmaids, Jesus explained another aspect of the kingdom of heaven.

Today's parable concerns three servants entrusted with their master's property while he is away. The man is going on a long journey... and he expects his staff to continue to make a profit while he is gone. The man provides the resources... and his staff needs only to follow his instructions.

To one he gave five talents... to another two... and to another one.

A talent was a unit of coinage. The responsibility of the servants was to ensure the master's money did not lie idle... but was productive and profitable... something to which they would be called to account on his return.

In the previous parable... the bridesmaids are represented as waiting for the Lord. ... In this one... the servants are working for the Lord. ... Both are responsibilities in the light of the return of Christ. ... Vigilance is the keynote of the first parable... diligence is that of the second. ... Last week... we saw that we are to watch. This week... we see that we are to work.

Watch and work... Both parables are essentially about alertness... because a faithful watchfulness will always produce faithful working. This time... however... the issue is not whether those who are serving will be

surprised by the master's return... but whether they will be dependable in the use of his resources.

Alertness requires effort and continual active participation in the work of the Kingdom. Perhaps the familiar proverb attributed to William Carey is appropriate here: "Attempt great things for God, expect great things from God."

Matthew 25:14-30

This story is unique because it goes beyond simply watching and waiting for Jesus to return and focuses primarily on working until Jesus comes back. ... It is not enough for Jesus' followers to "hang in there" and wait for the end. ... They must see themselves as servants... who improve what their Master entrusts to them. "When Christ returns... He will not ask if you had the date right... but... '*What have you been doing?*'"

Let's go back to the beginning of the parable... and work our way through it. There is so much here for us.

Matthew 25:14-15

God gives different gifts and functions to different people. The ratio of five... two... and one... does not indicate a different value on the person... but a different significance to their work. ... There are those entrusted with greater responsibility than others... but all are to fulfil their responsibility with equal integrity.

That phrase "*according to his ability*" is used in the sense "*according to his able-ness*" ("power" [*dynamis*] is the actual word). In other words... if I

know that Fred is **able** to lift heavy objects... I might give him heavy objects to lift.

So the ability or able-ness... is not the same thing as the **talent** that was given to them. ... Able-ness **preexists** the talent. ... Do you see this...? The talent is something above and beyond the ability.

What... then... does the talent represent... if it is not ability or able-ness...?

Talents in this parable represent... **OPPORTUNITIES**. God assigns work and opportunity according to ability. This is how we are assigned our ministry prospects. Every believer is given some measure of opportunities... and it is our privilege to serve the Lord in order to multiply further opportunities. We are responsible to use – well – what God has given us. Each believer should faithfully utilize the occasions that are entrusted to him or her... from the Lord.

Now... it is quite interesting that the symbol of a **talent** is used for our God-given ministry circumstances. The talent was not a small sum of money in Christ's day. They had much smaller units of money. ... According to several of the sources that I read... it is worth several hundred thousand dollars... in terms of today's money. ... And the point should be very clear.

We might view an opportunity to involve ourselves in a certain ministry as **no big deal**... really. But of all the units of money that Christ could have used... He used one of such a **high** value. ... Why do you think He chose the talent? ... Apparently He does not see our invitation to join Him in Kingdom work... as **lightly** as we often do. To Him... it IS a BIG DEAL ! The amount of just ONE talent is surprisingly high... and the shock of it

is intended to compel us to take it more seriously! We are to be good stewards... responsible for the OPPORTUNITIES that He sends our way.

Matthew 25:16-18

Don't overlook the start of verses 16 and 17: "*He who had received the five talents went at once*" and got to work, and "**So also**" the next guy. ... And then... we see then the opposite of diligence and immediacy in the last guy. He eventually got around to doing something with the money. He dug a hole (did that take an hour or ten minutes to dig?) and buried the money in it.

This third guy represents the conduct of those who neglect the opportunities that God has given... and fail to do what He requires of us. This is done often:

1. On the plea that we do not have the right status. "*Who am I? I am a nobody. There are so many others who are better qualified...*"
2. That we have inadequate abilities... and can do little good.
3. As it was in this case... that God had not gifted me with as much experience and opportunity as He has gifted others - and therefore we do nothing.

If any of this sounds even vaguely familiar... then this is a parable meant for you.

Matthew 25:19-23

Applied to Christians... this means that they who rightly improve their opportunities will... at the return of Christ... be promoted to great honors in heaven... and be partakers of the joys of their Lord in the world of glory. ... And how will they be honored...? They will be given more opportunities in Heaven!

As one commentator put it, "Heavenly rewards are not beds of rest; they are posts of duty." Or as another one put it, "Christ knows no idle life, not even in the kingdom of heaven."

When the kingdom age dawns... the Lord will need many people to administer His affairs. ... If you are a born again believer... you and I will have different bodies that can do other things than what we are limited to right now. But for this 1000 year period... there will still be humans (just like we are now)... living on the earth. And we will help King Jesus administer His rule.

This present age is our probation. We are given opportunities as trusts... and the way we handle them... will determine our positions in the millennial kingdom.

Matthew 25:24-25

His view of God is so *high* ... it's too *low*: "*Oh, Lord, you're such a sovereign master, an unmoved mover, that whatever I did with this talent wouldn't matter to you anyway, so I did nothing.*" Do you hear what he was saying...? He cloaked his laziness behind his solemn God-talk excuses. He has a high view of God... but a wrong view of God. He has a fear of

God... but an improper fear of God. And thus he has the audacity to blame generous Jesus for his own apathy and inactivity.

He reminds me a bit of Adam, who said, “The woman *whom you gave* to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (Genesis 3:12). He also reminds me of the church leaders who told the great missionary William Carey when he brought before them his idea of taking the gospel from England to India, “*Sit down, young man; when God chooses to save the heathen he will do so without your help or ours!*”

The third servant in our parable... did not know the character of his master... so did not trust the motives of his master... and out of fear of the unreasonable demands he thought were being made... hid his talent to avoid the hard work and risk of using it to create more.

(LISTEN!) ... Most failure in the Christian life has... at its root... a false understanding of the character and purpose of God. ... If that can be distorted in our thinking... then our response to Him... and our conduct arising from that response... will inevitably be distorted. The man of course was wrong in his assessment of his master. This third man saw his master as harsh and unloving.

But that certainly is not the picture we get... when we see him deal with the first two. I don't think that I have to take too much dramatic license to see a gleam in the first servant's eyes as he very excitedly says “*Here! I have made five more...*” And I'm pretty sure the Master said in joyful tones: “*Well done good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your master...*” There is joyous intimacy here! ... Then this whole sequence is repeated with the second servant who was given two talents. The first two guys saw

the Master much different than the third... and their relationship with him was friendlier... and joyous. Most failure in the Christian life has... at its root... a false understanding of the character and purpose of God.

Matthew 25:26-30

Jesus will have none of this blame game. "You wicked and slothful servant! You *knew* that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed?" ... Let's play your game—that I'm this cruel and unjust sovereign. Even if that's who I really am... that's still no excuse for not doing anything. 'Then you ought to have [at the very least] invested my money with the bankers... and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.' ... In summary... any way you look at the situation... the issue is not my character flaw... it's yours."

God will judge people not merely for doing wrong, but for not "doing" right.

The sin here is the sin of omission. We all know that sins of commission—like murder... adultery... stealing... and so on — are wrong and worthy of some kind of judgment. ... But what's so wicked about laziness? That's the sin here — sloth... or laziness (not doing work). ... Is that the opposite of "faithful"? ... It is here to Jesus! ... Unfaithfulness is wickedness... and is a punishable offense... of a very great price.

But as we consider this extreme punishment... we have to deal with the most difficult statement in the parable. He was cast into "*outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" This third servant has been treated as a servant of the Master (just like the other two.) They all serve the same master... and as we interpret this parable... we treat it as

instructing Christians... for how they should wait for Christ (OUR Master) to return. In other words... it looks as though THIS believer gets thrown into Hell.

Here is what J Vernon McGee offers on this difficulty:

What else could the statement mean? It does not refer to some kind of purgatory, for the Bible knows of no such place; purgatory is the invention of Catholic theologians. The statement cannot mean that the man was once saved and somehow lost his salvation, for such an idea is contrary to the tenor of the whole New Testament, which denies that salvation is in any way dependent on our works.

To avoid the difficulty inherent in this verse, some have envisioned the place of "outer darkness" as some remote spot, in the kingdom but far removed from the central glory in Jerusalem. But the Bible speaks of no such place. And this theory does not explain the "weeping and gnashing of teeth," an expression used elsewhere to refer to the misery of the lost in Hell.

What then do we know about the destiny of the worthless servant? We do know that the question of personal salvation will not be raised at the judgment seat of Christ. We know too that rebukes and rewards will be commensurate with neglect or service, as the case may be. Since this servant was one of the Lord's own people, we cannot envision him suffering personal anguish in the flames of a lost eternity. But may it not be that such faithless servants as he will be taken to that place of "outer darkness" not to suffer but to see? May it not be that they will be taken to where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" not to be punished or purged, but to see souls they might have reached—to see the result of their sinful failure and neglect? It may well be.

Then in grace the Lord will wipe away their tears, and the judgment will be over. The church will be forever free from blemish. Those rewarded will reign with Christ. Others, like the faithless servant in the parable, will enter the kingdom "saved; yet so as by fire" and, at least for the millennial age, suffering loss (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)

What we can say is this: The consequences of any believer's laziness are terrifying! The Lord is not going to ask us how much we have done for Him... but how faithful we have been to that which He wanted us to do.

For the child of God there are two important things: (1) Find out what God wants us to do; that is... determine what the talent is... that He has given us... and then (2) be faithful in the use of it. ... To some of us God gives a very small ministry... and that may be upsetting to us. ... But if we are one-talent people... God expects us to be faithful with that.

As true servants... we are on mission for Him. ... Therefore... the import of this parable is sobering: We are to be good stewards of everything God has given to us. Every resource... whether tangible or intangible... is to be used for His glory... whenever we know that He is presenting us with an opportunity.

Perhaps you have heard of... or read some of his books. ... J. Oswald Sanders was nearing his ninetieth birthday when he died... working on his last book. ... Before he was 50... he was afflicted with arthritis so badly that he could hardly get out of bed. ... He could have taken a nice retirement. Instead he entered the most procreative years of his life.

At age 50... he left a prosperous career as an attorney in New Zealand... to lead the China Inland Mission (now Overseas Missionary Fellowship). Remarkably... as he entered his second and third careers he was totally freed from arthritis.

After several years of leading the mission... he retired... only to take on the directorship of a Christian college. Another step downward. Then he retired

again. A widower twice... he certainly deserved a rest. But rather than taking it easy... he accelerated... spending his last 20 years speaking around the world over 300 times per year.

God gave J Oswald Sanders 5 talents worth of ministry opportunities... and he turned them into more. He invested them wisely.

What are you doing with what God has entrusted to you? To be sure... this is not an attempt to "*earn your keep*" before Jesus returns. ... Rather... this is a demonstration of your love for Christ and your gratitude for what He has given you. ... Will you be commended for your love... or condemned for your laziness?