

**The Follow-Up**  
Matthew 25:14-30

Riley N.  
December 30, 2018

I am thrilled to be here yet again, and my intention today is to give a follow-up sermon. I'm cutting right to it once again. We spoke in November about the necessary act of preaching the Gospel to the lost, and why it matters to God. Well this sermon has the same level of importance. We need to be doing this because God demands it of us, and others need to hear it. What it is, is discipleship. Now, a lot of sermons start with an illustration, a nice picture of what the sermon is meant to be about, then explains the main point. For this sermon, there's a different direction though. I don't really need an illustration, **because our main text is explaining an illustration that God Himself** gave to His disciples, a picture of what Godly living looks like.

In my previous sermon that I preached on Nov. 4, I talked all about the relevancy of the command of the Great Commission for our lives. I discussed the objections that any Christian might have about following through with the G.C., and then I talked about how we can make it relevant. Well, I want to continue my mini-series with the same matter of relevancy and importance. This sermon is about making the Gospel, not only accessible, but necessary to our fellow men. I talked about a 3-step process for good Christian evangelism and it was as follows. A quick review of the Great Commission: "And Jesus said to them (the disciples on the Mount), All authority under heaven and earth has been given to Me, so go therefore and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded and I will be with you always, even unto the ends of the earth." So here was my summary. Number 1]- Preach the Gospel. That is, the present the truth about their sinful nature, and then show them the redemption that comes through Christ. Jesus died for your sins, the bad that every man has in Him, and He wants you to accept that He paid the price for those sins, and you have a place waiting for you with Him if you would accept Him as Saviour and Lord. Number 2]- Teach and Instruct them in the ways that they should go. This is taken directly from Christ's words. There is no inference to be made here. What is essential for Godly living is contained with the Word of God and it's to be consistently taught and instructed to the new believers who come to Christ. With this command from God comes the 3<sup>rd</sup> step, Number 3]- Go out and do likewise. The disciples job was to mirror Christ and so their job would not be complete until they were making more disciples. Finally, we have the sensational exhortation that God is with us as we do this, through every trial and tribulation, He is present and at our side guiding our thoughts and words.

Last time I preached, I gave some practical ways that we could begin evangelizing the Gospel. And I have been so blown away at some of the stories I've heard, especially from the younger generation and how our own people are reaching out to tell the truth of the Gospel to others. (I'm not letting anyone else off including myself, easy. I have heard myself said 'just do it' a multitude of times this past month when it comes to speaking of Christ. The mission continues. I said before, "The discipleship follow-up is another sermon in itself!" Well this is that other sermon. I want to give us a real understanding of the command of discipleship. I say command, because like evangelizing the Gospel, this is a non-optional instruction that must be carried out. The Word says from Matthew 28:18,19 "GO therefore."

Let's start with that word, discipleship. Merriam-Webster says that discipleship is "*the aid of spreading the doctrines of another.*" Anyone can tell you that. But that word is so lacking when it explains what Christians mean for discipleship. It doesn't compare to the weight and truth that must be expressed for effective discipleship to occur. Discipleship matters, and our method and

how we do it matters. We must combine our beliefs on God calling people into the fold and sync it perfectly with our duty to follow through with His calling. Real Christian discipleship is to grow in the Lord Jesus Christ while being equipped by the Holy Spirit, who resides in our hearts, to overcome the pressures and trials of this present life and become more and more Christlike. John 15:5-8 sums things up: "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." Christ is the vinedresser, 15:5 says. He prunes the tree, removing the branches that bear no fruit, and cleaning up the ones that do so that they bear even more fruit. He gives us the strength and ability to help Him prune those branches. Who better to learn about discipleship from than God incarnate in man; the living example for us.

The passage for today comes from both Matthew and from Luke, but I have chosen to read from Matthew, just for continuities sake. There are 5 major discipleship training sessions in the Gospel of Matthew. Everyday Discipleship, Missionary Discipleship, Covert Discipleship, Church/Body Discipleship and End Times Discipleship. Though there are many nuggets of wisdom contained within each of the 5 major sections, certainly, but we will be reading from Matthew 25, verse 14 to 30, which is End Times Discipleship. This passage is the parable talents, and it contains a very strong biblical teaching about what God feels we must do with the things that God has entrusted us with, and the things God has entrusted us to do. There is a Bible in the pew backs or underneath you if you don't have one, and it will be on the screen behind me if you'd like to follow along there.

What is the kingdom of heaven like, we wonder? Christ's answer starts in Matthew 25:14, "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 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.' 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.' 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.' 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.' 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, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' 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? 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. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 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. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Candace, my wife and I had an argument, (I know hard to believe married people are constantly in marital bliss), and we argued about the meaning of this parable. It wasn't a long argument, but it did show me a different interpretation than I immediately began to understand,

and frankly I'm glad that we talked about it. I thought the parable just meant the Gospel, and how we share it. Candace shared that it wasn't just the Gospel, it was everything spiritual that God entrusts to us. Jesus has a strong teaching about the effects of our walk with God here. When I first began to understand Jesus and the Bible, I was told that all that was required to be saved was trusting in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. The rest is working itself out. But then I read James 2:14, "we know that faith without works is dead. Can it save us?" I wondered at that point if Christ had anything to add to that statement, and He does. His teaching in Matthew 25 talks directly to this point.

What does this parable mean? The three servants are three people claiming to be Christians. The Master is God, and the talents are the spiritual things that Christ entrusts us with. Each person is trusted with specific spiritual things according to their willingness and ability. I've heard it said by many people that a talent represents a year's wage. This statement is untrue. In fact, it is about 100 times larger than that. Because we get paid in Canadian dollars and not Heavy Common talents, we don't understand the value of a talent. A talent far surpasses what most of us will ever earn in a lifetime and is absurd to consider for a slave. The talent, understood in the new testament was actually **not a coin as we imagine it in our head [discuss my preconception of the illustration, the size, weight, hiding it in the ground]**, but a measurement of gold equal to 130 lbs. If you work that out in today's Canadian money, it's 3.2 million dollars. So, the first slave was entrusted with 16 million dollars, the second with 6.5 million, and the third was just a meager 3.2 mill. The use of the talent in the story wasn't to say that what was given by the master was 5 years wage (still a lot), but instead, so great a payment that its unbelievable that anyone could even begin to pay back what the master trusted the slaves with. Jesus entrusted a sum of money so great that a slave could not even fathom the value of what he has been given. **And so it is with us.** We cannot understand the gifts that we have been given from God, and instead we must be grateful for the amazing outflow. The abilities and information God has given us is priceless. It cannot be earned in a thousand lifetimes.

When we come to know Jesus, He begins to entrust us with extremely valuable spiritual things (talents). If you're wondering, **yes that is where the English word talent, meaning an inherent ability, comes from.** At first, they certainly start small, and as we grow in Christ, He begins to entrust us with more work for the kingdom. Our obedience as Christians is the factor that determines what God gives us. At this point while I was writing, I began asking myself, "*what has God entrusted me with? How many talents have I in my possession?*" Have you asked yourself that, brothers and sisters? What in your life has God given to you, and how are you stewarding it? How you're making it grow?

The passage finishes with Christ clarifying His role to us. A lot of us will read the master's response to the third slave and assume that third slave accurately perceives the true nature of the master. In fact, I believed this until I heard John Piper explain this brief section of the parable and it makes sense with what the Bible actually teaches about Christ. "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' 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? 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.'"

Christ is not saying, "You *knew* that I reap where I have sown and gather where I have scattered no seed. The interpreters of the Greek correctly perceived something else in the

statement. The question mark. “You *knew* that I reap where I have sown!” becomes, “??You knew that I reap where I have sown??” If that I true about me, Christ, then why didn't you invest the money in a bank? At least I would have made interest that way. The foolishness of the third servant is displayed. He did not know the real heart of his master. He did not understand His master's nature. He believes His master to be a hard man. From the other slaves, we know this to be completely untrue. Imagine living a life devoted to your current boss. Instead of paying you with money, you simply live on his ranch and do whatever he wants you to do for free, until you die. One day he tells you he's going away and gives you 16 million dollars to take care of. You being smart, make great efforts to make your boss proud and grow his money. When he comes back to you, you tell him “Look boss, I've made you another 16 million on top of what you gave me” and your boss says, “Hey that's great, keep all 32 million and come celebrate with me. Who among us would say that boss is hard? Who can say that Christ is a hard man? He distributes evenly. He gives generously. The warning that comes with the third servant is this; there is a time where Christ is coming to settle the debt. Do you want to be the one hoarding the spiritual abilities, the Gospel of Christ, and not sharing it? Not using it to benefit the kingdom of God? Or do you want to be generously rewarded, and inherit eternity with the master?”

Jesus is going on a journey. He went on a journey 2000 years ago, after His death on the cross and His resurrection, He ascended to heaven. He gave us a task, and during His absence He expects obedience to the task. In the future, He will come back and collect on what He has distributed. He expects that each disciple is working according to his/her ability.

From the passage, we know that God loves when we multiply His efforts. He cares that we are looking after the things He's given to us. *“Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.” 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.’* If we are committing to completing the work of God, if we are following in obedience to Him, if we are discipling the nations, teaching them how to observe these commands as Christ has, **we are being that good and faithful servant**, entrusted with many things, and whom God will entrust with so much more! God honours the service of mankind with everlasting service. Not boredom, or useless service, but will give us more important service than we can accomplish here on earth. To the one who is unfruitful and miserly with the ability, everything will be taken from him. Neglect is disobedience, ignorance is disobedience, apathy is disobedience.

Our life is a small cycle. God entrusts to us spiritual gifts, we grow them, He gives us more, we obey and grow them, He entrusts more, and so on until the Great Beyond. If we are Christian's, we are moving forward. We are working towards a goal, we are obedient to Jesus' command. We're going out and seeking the lost. We're bringing them in to our homes, our churches, our lives. We're surrounding them with the love of God and we are making the introduction to Him. **God will make the final call and the acceptance, but He uses us to do everything short of salvation.**

There are four calls I have for us to seize from this sermon.

**My first call** is to make us realize and remember the importance, once again, of **the command**. We are being entrusted with spiritual abilities that some of us may not be aware of. I want us to be aware of the consequences of disobedience. It will be met with “Depart with me for I never knew you.” It will be met with “cast the worthless man out into the outer darkness”.

Coming off that dark note, there is the choice of obedience. Look at the servants who accepted the challenge of their master, and make double his money? Not only did the master give them the interest they made for him, he gave them the principle, and then he gave one the principle of the disobedient. We can't ever say that this master is merciless and evil. He took mercy on the ones who were honest and did his will. Let's make that ourselves. Let us become that man who does his masters will.

**The second call is to remember that God is with us through every step.** He will reward every effort we make for the kingdom. He is not merciless, He does not ignore our work. He is observant and helping using us.

**Thirdly, we must come together and make practical strategies for real discipleship.** This is not just about our small groups ministries, or the worship ministry, or the children's ministry, it is about a philosophy of change **individually**. It's about shifting our mindsets to making God's command real to other people. Imagine using **what God has given us for other people**.

It's been said that if we stopped having children in the church, we could not replace the loss of conversion fast enough to save Christianity. That's a call for us as parents, and I'm meditating on this with a young daughter and a child due in June. I've been a Christian for 7 years now and transitioned through many life stages in that time. My question is "What kind of practical discipleship is Sturgeon Valley engaging with at every stage?" We have people from 1 to 100 in this church. That's a lot of different life stages, and a lot of different opportunity. Thank goodness, because outside those doors, there are people all over this province from 1 – 100. They need God, and they need you to tell them about Him, and then they need you to help lead them.

As a father now, I feel this weight acutely. I know that the things I teach my daughter, how I treat her and raise her, will affect her walk with Christ in every way, and as a man, I am setting the example of who God is. Who the Father is. I don't think God has entrusted me with one talent. But for every person we speak to, for every person we interact with who does not know God, that you represent the same to them, as I do to Macy. You affect other peoples walk with Christ by your conduct, and your speech. That's why Paul talks about shedding the bad actions that we do in Ephesians 4. Ecclesiastes 5:2 says "Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God." While we commit to discipling others, mentoring them in their walk with Christ, **we need to have pure upstanding conduct, and clean righteous words.**

**These are some of the parts of the 'talent' that God has entrusted to us.** This is what good stewardship of the Lord's gifts starts with.

Finally, we must teach people how to appropriately disciple the new believer. Being a new believer is a very difficult time because you've been forgiven, your sins cleansed, you're made new in Christ, and you don't know what Christian living looks like. For me, I know what that is first hand. I didn't have anyone to lead me on that path when I first believed, and it is something we just expect as a church. *As soon as you know Christ, you stop sinning from the old life, right?* You have it all figured out.

Obviously, we know how wrong that is. Discipleship starts by seizing that talent and making some more. That means being a living example to others of Jesus, in word and deed. It could be answering the difficult questions when they're asked, and not giving the pre-packaged "mystery of God" answers. It might mean saying "You know, I don't know the answer. But I'm going to find out." And then actually finding out and answering the question and returning to them.

It means bringing them to groups like Alpha, an environment where anyone can ask anything about God and not feel ridiculed or ridiculous. **Discipleship is relationship.** Underline, bold italicize that. Jesus did not emotionally distance Himself from His followers. He was intimately acquainted with them. We should be intimately acquainted with other believers. More practically, its like making your own life a mini-Alpha group. You don't have to know Bear Grylls in the wild to have a compelling testimony. **Live yours.** Mentorship is something we attempted to do in an organized fashion years ago, and it failed. We need to be trying again. We should be creating relationships with people older for the younger and younger for the older, and if this is something that interests you, come speak with me. We can organize this group.

**Coming to church on Sunday is not enough.** This does not cut it. Meeting in a group of 300 people in a room where you shake someone's hand and say hello awkwardly is not discipleship. It's the beginnings of fellowship, certainly. It's a place where you can meet others on the road **to discipleship.** But it is not discipleship, nor is it enough for you as a believer to be fully discipled.

If you haven't got a mentor, get one. But if you do have one, then there are other places you can seek discipleship. Joining a small group is a great way to be discipled. **But you have to participate.** You must engage mentally with what you're hearing and seeing. It's not just about going to John and Suzy's house on Sunday evening to talk about the sermon, and then hearing everyone else's thoughts. They need to hear yours, you have valuable things to add, perhaps without even knowing it. These things are being a good steward, a good keeper, of the talents God is giving to you. These are ways to make more talents. Make more disciples, real disciples, walking down the road with you. We as a congregation are and should be, always in the process of being discipled. **Making more talents is not an overnight affair.** Using God's spiritual abilities given to you is not easy, nor is it quick. It's a process. The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. I want to encourage us to take those steps, get involved in small groups seriously, seek mentorships, invite your friends.

If you don't know Christ today, then this sermon may seem a little wordy. A little foreign to you. This sermon is about helping Christians, or people who say they know Jesus, but don't do anything about it, do something about it. **It's about making words to action. It's about taking the Bible and making it relevant.** If you don't know Christ, then today I encourage you to ask yourself, 'what's stopping me?' 'What do these guys sitting around me have? Why are they in love with doing God's will?' Talk to them, ask them the questions that are hard. Who is God? Who is Jesus? Why does He matter at all? For the believers in the room, this is a charge to you. If anyone asks you these questions, sit down with them and answer them honestly. Don't give half-baked answers. Invite them to a small group. If their younger and you're a firm believer, consider mentorship seriously. **If the only thing you do is come to church on Sunday, it's not enough.** Let's be the body, the hands the feet of Christ. Steward those talents.