



Date: February 22-23, 2020
Speaker: Matthew Eckert
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Scripture: *We Have a Song to Sing*
Matthew 25:14-30

Let us pray before we begin. Heavenly Father, it is good to be here and it is good to enjoy the scriptures. Jesus. We know that the Bible is not simply a book with random words, but something about it is powerful and it speaks to us in ways we can't even really understand yet it does so. Thank you for that. So, Lord, as we look at scripture this morning, I pray that you would just allow our hearts to be open and willing to accept what you have for us. A word of comfort, perhaps a word of encouragement, perhaps a word of challenge, whatever you have for us, may we will be willing to accept that. Thank you that we can be here this morning. We give you praise for that Amen!

Well, it's good to be here on this weekend, this Vision, 2020 weekend. I love to ponder about two months before what should go on this week and what do I want to share? As I thought about what I want to share actually at the services there's a parable that I came up with that I've been pondered for five years. But before I do that, I want to introduce you to my family. This picture was taken last Saturday December 21. My parents are in the middle. Dad's turning 88. My mom's 82 and always good to get together. The family has expanded over the years and it actually typically only once a year now we find four or five hours for all of us to get together these days at Christmas, usually. The rest the year we get together and whoever can make it can make it. But this is my family.

I come from a really good family actually, I appreciated what I've been given and I recognize in a room like this, not all of you have could have

experienced what I've been able to experience. But it's a good family. And like any family, any parents, my parents had these phrases, these things they wanted us to learn over the years, maybe as a parent or as a child you remember what your parents used to tell you. You know, those things they repeated over and over and over again.

Remember, those are maybe what you remember what your parents said or you know what you say. You know my kids, if I asked them, they'd probably say things like Dad would always say to us, life isn't fair. So get over it. It was one of my phrases I think I gave if they ever would complain about school. I think my standard answer was always, you know what, there's a probably a child somewhere in the world that would love to trade places with you. So just let me know and I'll make arrangements.

They didn't complain about school too many times after that. Right. You have your statements, right. You can probably kind of write some down the standard things you keep repeating over and over again. My parents were similar. My mom had this phrase she gave us, she'd always look at us and say, kids, life is very daily. So just enjoy the beauty of the daily.

If you're a parent with young kids, you know really what I mean, right? There is the wake up routine. Then the breakfast routine. Get off to school routine. Come home routine. Homework routine, dinner routine. Go to bed routine. And guess what? The next morning, the get up routine, the breakfast routine. You know that, right. Life is just very daily. If you don't find the beauty in the daily, then life

can become a drudgery can't it? My mother would repeat it to us over and over again, kid's life is very daily, enjoy the daily. My dad said something to me and I didn't always like it. Probably about once a year he would look at me and he'd have this thing. He'd say, Matt, I want you to know that God has given you a lot of abilities.

Now, every parent would say that to a child, right? You believe the best of your kids. He really knew me well enough.

He would say that to me and as parents you love your kids, right? You'll say these things. You believe your child's going to be the next great _____. You fill in the blank. You may say that to your kids. It wasn't that first part of the phrase perhaps that was kind of intriguing to me. I just kind of said, thanks, dad. Appreciate that. It was the second piece he always added on.

He said that God has given you a lot of abilities, and as such, he's going to require a lot of you. Even if you just kept the first half and not added the second half, it would have been OK. But he kept going over it every year, he'd say, Matt, God has given you a lot of abilities and he's going to require a lot of you.

In essence, he was asking me, are you going to be willing to step in? Whatever he has for you to do?

The parable I want us to talk about, maybe if you've grown up in the church world, you already are thinking about what this parables about. Interestingly, I was with a good friend of ours two weeks ago he gave me this quote just offhand and I thought that quote summarizes and brings together so much what I wanted this talk about.

It's a quote from a guy named *Henry David Thoreau*, a philosopher in the eighteen hundreds. This is what he penned.

Most people lead lives of quiet desperation and die with their song still inside them".

Now you can get depressed over this quote, it may sound really sad, but the beautiful part of this quote for me is not through that first line. It's the second part. That if he is true. If he's right. There is a song inside of you. There is a song inside of me and we're called to sing it.

As a follower of Jesus, you have to believe that it is the God of the universe that has put a song inside of you. He's put something for the world to hear. The reality is, will you choose to sing that song or will you die with the song still inside of you?

So I want us to look at this parable. It's found in the book of Matthew the first book of the second half of the Bible, one of the Gospels. The Stories of Jesus in Matthew 25 and it's known as the parable of the Talents or the parable of the Three Servants.

It's this beautiful story. If you're not familiar with it, it's actually a pretty straightforward parable. You almost can't spin it too much. It says what it says. Well, let's walk through it and as we do, think about this idea of there's this song inside of you that God is calling you to sing.

Matthew 25:14

The kingdom of heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip.

Now, this old idea of the kingdom of heaven, it's an important idea to always think about Jesus' use of this terminology, actually Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God. You know, this morning we're going to be celebrating communion. By celebrating communion, we remember what Jesus Christ did for us. Right? His blood poured out for us, his body broken for us. His death and his resurrection brings us, gives us eternal life if we believe in him.

But if we don't watch it, this can become very much a, what I would call a transactional faith. I do the belief thing. I check the box and the prayer thing. I've got the eternal heaven thing taken care of. And then I just go and live my life. But that was never Jesus language. Jesus always talked about a kingdom of heaven is coming. It's here. It is now. We are called to live in it. Now. What does the Lord's Prayer say, your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.

So when he talks about the kingdom of heaven, he's talking about the now, the life you're living in. He said this about a man going on a long trip, the man himself is in this parable is Jesus who leaves and ascends to heaven, he's going away. He called together his servants. Those would be us. Those be the ones of us who choose to follow him.

He trusted them, his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another and one bag of silver to the last, dividing in proportion to their abilities. Then he left on his trip. Now, this parable specifically is talking about his money, he gives. But think of it as something much bigger. Think of it as the entirety of who you are. It is for sure your resources that you have at your disposal, but it's also your gifts and talents and abilities and your time and your cultural context and the place you were born and the relationships and connections you have. These are all, think of them as different notes to the song you're called to sing. As you put these notes together, God has a song for you to sing for the sake of his kingdom, for the sake of the world. That's what you've been given. How will you spend that? Will you sing that song? It's your calling. It's your purpose. We go on to.

Matthew 25:16

the servant who would receive five bags of silver began to invest the money and he earned five more.

The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and he earned two more. So far, the story is a pretty good story.

But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the Masters, money.

Conflict is introduced into the parable.

Matthew 25:19

After a long time, their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they used his money.

You cannot get away from this phrase. You can spin in it any way you want to. But the reality is you and I will be called to give an account. Whatever you think of, the end of time according to this parable, at the end of time, you will stand before God himself and he would say, did you sing the song I gave you to sing? Did take all the notes. Did you do something beautiful with it? We will have to stand and look at him and say, what? What stuff? Did you invest it? I put you in a certain place and you have certain skills and ability and all these connections. How did you invest them? What's my return? Because you here what it says in the parable how they had used his money. You see, your life changes

completely if you believe that what you have is yours or what you have, you're simply given to steward. Is it yours or is it given for you to steward? It changes how you go about life, doesn't it? But your time is not your time, your resources are not your resources, your skills and abilities are not your skills and abilities. They are given you on loan to go and invest for the sake of the kingdom. Do you see what you have in that perspective? Are you a steward of what you've been given or do you hold tightly as though you own this and it's my? Once again, it's the entirety of who you are. He says the servant to whom he entrusted the five bags of silver came forward. He was held account with five more and said, Master, you gave me five to invest and I've earned five more. The master was full of praise. Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faith on handling this small amount. So now I'll give you many more responsibilities. Let's have a party. Let's celebrate. Your song was amazing. You took all the notes and you put them together and the song was beautiful. Wait a sing wait a sing.

Stephen Covey wrote a book years ago, maybe some of you have heard about or read it's called The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. The one habit is about, he says, *begin with the end in mind*. Begin with the end in mind. What would our lives look like if we began every day by thinking about the end? How would I live today? For God one day to look at me and say, well done, good and faithful servant. How would I spend my first few hours and set my day up if my desire was to hear that? How would I map out my week? How would my year 2020 look like if my desire was the think about the end of my life and desire? I want God to say, well done. Let's celebrate. How would I structure and use my time? You begin with the end in mind.

He goes on,

The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest. I've earned two more.

I sang the song. The Master said well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling the small amounts. So now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's party. You sang the song. It's an amazing thing. I think we can look at this parable even as a bit bigger as far as who is

going to be held accountable. Because, yes, it's very specific here at saying you and I will one day be accountable before God. But I think we can broaden it if you are married here today. I think God looks at you and says, as a married couple, I have given you abilities together.

I think maybe God will have you stand before Him one day and he said, how did you do? As a family, as a family unit, as kids? I think you can look at that, say God has given you uniqueness together. What will he say is how you did as a family, as a group of friends that may be gathered together and do life together. God has uniquely gifted and put things together as friendships. You looked at each other and saying, what should we do together? What song can we sing? For the sake of the kingdom. In the same way as leaders at North Park, we're given responsibility over this community's local church called North Park Community Church.

What would it look like if one day in heaven God gathered a bunch of us together and he looked at us, how do you guys do, give account for how you all entered in and as a church, how did you influence your city, your country and the world? Will we celebrate together? What would be an amazing choir that each of us took our part and sung to the glory of God.

Well, we go on to verse 24,

then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, Master, I knew you were a harsh man harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth.

Look. Here's your money back. I didn't want to sing the song because this is what I hear about you, this is what I see about you. This is how I interpret you. Now, the amazing thing in this passage, we never get an explanation of what the servant saw correct or not. You see, the master never justifies things. We never get an explanation. Here's what I think is this person's situation. And maybe you've experienced this. Maybe you're in the situation yourself. You look at God and say, you know what? What I've experienced in life, it doesn't seem to line up with who God is supposed to be.

So I don't want to serve him. Or I've read these scriptures, these parts, the Bible and God apparently is doing these things and letting things happen. I can't really justify God you really did that? Because they don't understand it, I don't want to reach out and serve you because it just doesn't make sense to me. Maybe you've had those moments reading the Bible. Or what's the one statement so many people make? If God is a God of love, why is there so much suffering? God, I don't understand you. Because I don't I'm not all in. Because you haven't explained yourself to me enough. But the reality is we as humans live in a specific point in time of all of history, in a specific cultural context.

We will never see the entirety of the story here on Earth as well as in the spiritual realm. God could never, in our limited abilities explain all that's going on. Do we allow what we don't understand about God get in the way of us still trusting the God of the universe who created all things and to still sing the song he's given us to sing? Or do we hold back because, you know what God, I read that about you and because of that I don't want to do it. Because the reality is you will still be held account at the end of time and so will I.

Matthew 25:26

but the master replied, You wicked and lazy servant. If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops that I didn't cultivate. Why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on.

The master never justifies himself before the servant because in reality, the master doesn't have to justify themselves before the servant. The God of the universe who created me and you doesn't have to justify himself to us. He is God. We are not. The servant is told he is lazy and missed the point. You see, the question we always have to ask ourselves is who is the God you're serving? Are you trying to create a God that seems to make sense for you in your world as to what you want him to do? Or are you willing just to step back and trust saying, God, I will trust you and I will follow you no matter what. You are, God. I am not. It's a question we always have to wake up to every single day, don't we? I know I do. I will trust you today. I will not understand everything about today. I'll read the

Bible today. I didn't really understand that piece. God, that didn't seem to..... I will trust you today.

You are God. I'm not.

Matthew 25:28

He ordered, Take the money from the servant and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver to those who use well what they are given, even more will be given and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, or they'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth..

You can't get away from this parable. It's a pretty straightforward story, you can't manipulate it and twist it. God has put in you, if you're a follower of him, things, resources, talents, abilities, connections, skills, and he says those are notes for your song. Now write a beautiful song and go sing. At the end of time He'll say, give me the score sheet. How do you do? What's your song sound like? What does this look like? As I said, this is the fullness of your life, it's all of who you are. Let me just kind of throw a few things out here. The first one I threw up there is money. I'm not going to spend much time. And this of course, this is a piece in the actual a parable was all about giving you money.

The amazing thing on this. Those of us who live in this cultural context here in London, Ontario, we are part of the top 5 percent of wealth in the entire world. I think one day God is going to actually have the entire Church of North America stand before him and say, I gave you the most of anybody. How did you do? And what will God declare of the church in North America?

But they're such amazing stories here at North Park and so many of you have been so generous. The generosity is just amazing. I got a chance for my position to see things that maybe many of you don't have a chance to see. Some of you just oozed financial generosity. You can't wait to find the next thing that you can give things into. Let me give you two quick little stories here on two different extremes. We have a number of refugee families continuing to come in. We continue to support what they do. We have great families that come around.

In the middle of March we have six people coming, a family of five with the mother. Parents, three kids and the one lady's mother. So where do you put the family of six? How do you find a home that's reasonably priced that you can put them in and the costs are so high and there's only so much money to go around? Someone stepped forward said, I got it. Then went and bought a house and is renting it back at way below market price, so it's affordable. They said I got resources. Sure. Here you go. Let's do this thing.

On the other end of the spectrum.

Last fall, we had our turkey lunches, right, with these schools that we connect with. And there's a person I connect with on Saturdays and it's a person with very little means, very little financial means. They probably have to manage every single nickel they spend. Always here. Always friendly. Always grateful to be present, and they came to me and they said, I want to give a little bit. Can I just help with the Turkey lunches? They handed me a Toonie and they said, Can you do something with this? I looked at her and said, thanks for your generosity. I went to the team and said, you invest this. In my mind this is thousands and thousands of dollars. You see, it's not equal gifts, but it's equal sacrifice. This person gave the little bit they could, a Toonie. I talked to them other day and I said that story still resonates in my mind. I still can see them giving it to me and saying it's all I got. But can you invest it? And I said, yeah, we'll invest this. We'll invest it. It's part of what we have, our resources right. How do we look at them? They're mine or I'm a steward and how am I called to invest?

Well, there's your skills, your abilities, your talents, right. God has uniquely gifted you do certain things. I love the team who are three individuals who oversaw much of the renovation that took place here in 2015. Then they stepped up again. At Stratford's site we need people to design it and oversee it and that team said, that they will do it They took the skills they've learned in the marketplace and said we can invest them for the church for sure, we'll do that. They designed it and they implemented it and Stratford looks amazing.

They're looking at another project for us right now. It's just this beautiful story of people taking their skills and saying I'll invest those for the kingdom

for sure. There's passions. I think God has put in each of us a passion for something. Whether it's the area of fostering and adopting or homelessness or mental health or whatever it might be, he's put in each of us and he is calling every one of us. Come on, step into that. How often do we take that passion saying, well, that's going to be a lot of energy, I'm putting that one down. But God says no no, I've given every single one of you a passion. And if we all entered into those moments, how much different what our city be? How much different would it be?

Then he's given us time. Now we all have the same amount of time. No one has more or less we all those 24 hours in a day. But do you ever look at yourself and look at your time? You ever think of the end? Well done, good and faithful servant. How should I allocate my time so God will declare one day, you took that piece of your song and you invested your time in such beautiful ways and people's lives and in here and there.

Let me just talk to those of you who are parents with kids briefly on this piece. Specifically as a staff, we recently watched this simulcast called the Spiritually Vibrant Household. It was research done by Barna Research. This came out last fall and there they went saying OK what is a spiritually vibrant household? What makes them vibrant? What is it about it? Are they doing devotions five times a day and pausing to reflect for five hours and, you know, attending church 30 times a week? What is it about them? They were as surprised at the data as anyone else. Here's the few key findings.

First of all, kids became a catalyst for any interaction, including faith related ones. Probably not too crazy because what do kids do? Kids ask questions. Right. Why do you believe this? Why do you do this? What's the Bible, say about, this? Do you believe in God? Who is God? What about Jesus. They just ask questions and as a family, you're forced now to enter into conversations, right? You have to answer and you're forced to become engaged. Now, the reality in this one is you may not have small kids in your home anymore, but can you come and approach Christianity one more time with a childlike curiosity? Can you just start asking the questions that kids ask and maybe change the spiritual vitality of your house no matter what it looks like?

Secondly, though, faith formation is deeply connected to and increases with hospitality. Do you allocate time in your life to just hang out with people and eat some food? It might be amazing food. It might be the most basic food ever. The reality is we're just being together and we're spending time and enjoying each other's company and loving each other. If hospitality doesn't exist in your family, this research says the vitality of faith is lessened.

But the third thing they found and they were as surprised as anybody. Spiritually vibrant households are characterized by fun and quality time as a family. Do you laugh at home? You just have a totally fun time, or is your home full of conflict and stress and issues? If you can't come home to fun, then according to this research there's a lesser opportunity for spiritual vitality in your home.

My wife is a master of this. When I would get home from work and the entire living room is turned into a fort. Furniture is moved around and somewhere under there I'd find her and the kids eating crackers and cheese and just doing whatever they're doing. I'd come home sometimes our kids got older and I'd come into a snowball fight with marshmallows. Instigated by my wife as they ran around the home and hit each other with marshmallows and it's just fun. Even today, I'll get home and my grandson is there and there'll be buckets of water and stones and diggers and a bucket of snow brought into the house and food coloring and just having a hoot and a holler and making a mess of everything. I will clean it up later. Let's have fun. Let's have fun. Is your house a place of fun? Parents. Do you allocate time for fun? The entirety of who you are God has put in you all these notes for this song. He's given you resources and time and talents and abilities and connections. He's given you this cultural context in the world. At the end of time, you're going to stand before him and we will stand before him and he'll say, what's the return on my investment? Did you double it? Did you triple it? Did you sing the song, or did you hide it?

I told you about my family at the beginning, I had that picture up there. I come from amazing family. I just have to say that up front I recognize all of you don't. My family goes back multiple generations, I've shared a bit of the story in the past. I'll share it again now. My dad was born in a little Mennonite

German village in the Ukraine. In 1932 at that time the Russian revolution was going on and he was the fourth child to be born. His dad loved Jesus, my grandfather. He did what he could to serve Jesus in the midst of a place that was very anti-faith. When my father was 1, something amazing and crazy happened to his dad. My dad actually found the story. He's written it out for us. Let me read you a bit of the story. This is my dad's words speaking here.

This is what it says. On May 31, 1933 so he would've been one. My father, my grandfather preached at a funeral service in a neighbouring village it was very risky to perform a Christian funeral service at this time. On his way home from the Fishell funeral service. My father was arrested as he walked past the police station. However, he was allowed to go home in order to bid farewell to his family. Before he left his family with a police escort, he read some versus from the Bible with special emphasis on

Psalm 55:22

Leave your burdens to the Lord and he will take care of you. You will not permit the godly to slip and fall. After the Bible reading he knelt with the entire family in the room. There in the presence of the police my father entrusted each of his children and his wife into God's care and protection.

The final parting was very emotional and difficult for the family. As my father left, my mother remarked, we won't see each other again. Upon which my father responded. If it's the Lord's will, we will meet again on Earth. But if not, then may God grant us a glorious reunion up in heaven. It was in August of 1933 that my mother received a card from my father begging her to bring him some food and some winter clothing as he was about to be sent for three years into northern Siberia. While on his way to Siberia father became seriously ill and was taken from the train in Charcot. He died there shortly after. His death was due to hunger and dehydration. A funeral service was arranged in the Linden Church. This church was right next to our family home and thus ended all the hopes and dreams that accompany my parent's marriage on the 22nd day of March 1919.

To my grandfather, who I never knew, who my dad actually never knew. Let's give it a song to sing in the most difficult of circumstances. He stood firm and he sang the song and singing the song cost him his very life. When he was 38 years old his song ended, but did it end? Because you see a song well sung reverberates across the generations. His song reverberated into my dad's life and I believe it's reverberated into my life as I wrestle with the very things that my generations have wrestled with.

God has given us the song as a church to sing, but we can only sing our song if everybody in the choir chooses to sing their piece of the song. God is put in you amazing notes, amazing pieces. You have to decide what will your life be counted for? You believe it's your stuff, then you'll live a life differently than if you believe it's God's stuff and you are simply a steward of it and you're called to sing a song. What would it look like in your life, at your job, in your school, into your marriage and your families and your community in the city of London if you sang a song and invested what God has given you for the sake of the kingdom.

That's what we're called to do. I don't know about you, but I want to celebrate. I want to hear well, done good and faithful servant. Well done for your faithfulness.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the beauty of all that is here, for the clarity of the story of Jesus. Oh, Jesus, thank you that we can ponder and reflect. Oh, God, forgive me when I hold back what you've given to me. God forgive us when we choose to look inward. God, may we be good investors. May we be even good singers of what you've given us. Jesus, guide us, convict us, encourage us, challenge us, motivate us to live the life you've called us to live, the name of Jesus, our Savior who died for us. Amen. Amen.

Points to Ponder

We Have a Song to Sing ~ Matthew 25:14-30

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions...

1. What are some songs that when you hear them, you immediately sing along? Why is that? Is it the tune ... the words? What is the song expressing?
2. What do you think of the idea that God has put a song in you to sing (meaning, he has given you talents, passions and resources to use for Kingdom impact)?
3. Read Matthew 25:14-30. What are some of the highlights in this parable for you?
4. The third servant made some statements about his understanding of the master—"I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate." It is suggested that his lack of a full understanding of the master held him back from fully participating in the talents he was given. How are you held back from fully committing to what God has for you due to a lack of understanding of God and an unwillingness to fully trust Him anyway?
5. What do you believe is the song God has put in you to sing? Are you singing it with all of your strength? What are your next steps to fully embrace this?