

## **“What Dream or Opportunity Have You Buried Out of Fear?”**

**Matthew 25:14-30**

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Our attention this morning is drawn to one of the most thought-provoking parables Jesus told. It has several twists and turns, like good stories do, and leads to many questions we could ponder.

One of the questions I am most frequently asked focuses upon the servant who was given one talent. **What did he do to merit the rebuke and punishment he received?**

Did he lie, cheat or steal? No. Did he lose something of great value? No. Was he irresponsible? I don't think so.

What, then, did he do that was so bad? He let fear control him, which caused him to pass up an opportunity to take what he had been given, which was good, and make it better. Let me explain.

Prior to going away on a long trip, a landowner called in three of his servants. He gave each one a large sum of money, although each received a different amount based upon his ability to manage it. He gave five talents to one servant, two talents to another and one talent to the third servant.

You need to understand that each servant received a substantial amount of money, including the servant who only received one talent. A talent was a measure of weight estimated to be between 58-80 pounds. One talent was the equivalent of years of wages for a common laborer who was paid in copper, silver or gold. Therefore, even the servant with one talent was given a lot of money to take care of during the landowner's absence.

While no instructions were given as to how the money was to be used, there is no doubt the landowner wanted each servant to multiply what he had been given. This is what businessmen and women expect, especially when they are going to be away for a long period of time as this landowner was.

When the landowner came back from his trip, the servant given the five talents returned to his owner double the original amount, ten talents. The servant who received two talents did the same thing, giving the landowner four talents.

The landowner was so pleased and excited with the good work of these two servants, he lavished them with praise and gave them promotions. Things did not go so well with the third servant, though.

This servant returned to the landowner the original talent he was given—nothing more and nothing less. It appears the money given to this servant had been sitting idly in a hole in the ground the entire time the landowner had been gone. Apparently, this servant buried it there for safe keeping, which was not uncommon in that culture. To say the least, the landowner was not pleased with his decision.

He berated this servant by calling him evil and lazy and scolded him for not even taking the money to a banker where it could have been invested and earned interest. The landowner ordered someone to take away this servant's money and give it to the servant who had ten talents. He then fired the servant who disappointed him and sent him away.

**Why did he do this?** Perhaps the answer can be found in the defense this servant offered to the landowner.

“Master, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So **I was afraid** and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.” (Matthew 25:25-25)

The fear of failure made this servant foolish and faithless and kept him from doing what the other servants did. He was so afraid of losing what he had been given, he even refused to turn this money over to a banker who, at the very least, would have paid interest on it. This decision cost this servant his job and no doubt led to more fear and anxiety when he was cast into darkness with no place to go.

*I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground.*

**What dream or opportunity have you buried out of fear?** I wonder what you have missed. I wonder what the world has missed.

In Matthew, this parable is placed just before the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. His life and public ministry were coming to an end. How do you think Matthew intended to use this parable?

I believe Matthew wanted to challenge his readers to continue the work Jesus began by taking an inventory of the gifts, dreams and opportunities God had given them to change the world for the better. He wanted to inspire the next generation of believers to be as bold and courageous as Jesus was. So, Matthew used this story to encourage his readers to confront their fears with a strong faith in the same God who enabled Jesus to fulfill his divine mission.

Under no circumstances did Matthew want fear to control his readers, especially the fear of failure. This was why Matthew assured them God would not be disappointed in them if their efforts to do His will failed, but God would be upset if they even refused to try to continue the good work Jesus began. They would be held accountable for their lack of effort based upon fear.

*I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground.*

**What dream or opportunity have you buried out of fear?** When have you been foolish and faithless?

What talents, skills, abilities and resources has God given you that have not been used the way God hoped they would be? What opportunities to make a difference in your life and those around you did you ignore because your faith was too weak? What hopes and dreams did God lay on your heart that were buried because you were afraid you would not succeed?

How long did you hold on to these dreams before you dug that hole? How did you feel when you walked away?

You know what I think breaks God's heart more than anything else? I believe it is wasted potential. God grieves when He sees people who have been given much achieve so little. I think God sheds tears every time He watches one of His children get out a shovel and bury a dream because God knows many of these dreams did not have to die.

And yet, the fear of failure or the fear of disappointing others is so strong it can drown out God's encouraging and reassuring words. **How can we keep this from happening?** How can we be bold and courageous in the face of strong headwinds? Begin by disciplining yourself to listen to God instead of your fears.

The same God who gives you talents, skills, abilities and dreams wants you to know He will walk with you on this journey of faith. You can count on God to provide the wisdom, guidance, courage and confidence you need so you can conquer your fears instead of being controlled by them.

“Fear knocked on the door. Faith answered. No one was there.” This English proverb has encouraged many people facing intimidating challenges. Could this be the message God wants you to hear today?

Will you receive it and let it inspire you to use the gifts God has given you in ways that honor and please Him? Will you embrace a faith which assures you of God’s presence and power as you walk through doors of opportunity that can lead to a better life for you and those who look to you as a role model? Will you refuse to let fear control you, but allow your faith to help you follow where God is leading you? Will you take the first step this morning?

I hope you will, and I am confident God does, too.