

Good morning, church. For our time together, we consider *A Sacred Trust*, as we focus our attention on Matthew 25:14-30 – Jesus’ parable of the talents. Because every Scripture must be interpreted in its context, Matthew chapters 24 and 25 contain Jesus’ response to the disciples’ questions about “*the end times.*” “*Tell us, what is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*” In Matthew 24, Jesus presented signs of the end times, descriptions of the time of Great Tribulation, revelations of His Second Coming, and clarifications of the specific day and hour when time as we know it ends. Then, in Matthew 25, as illustrations, Jesus presented two parables – the parable of the ten virgins to illustrate personal readiness regarding the end times and the parable of the talents to illustrate personal stewardship regarding living in the end times.

14) For it is just like a man about to go on a journey. He called his own servants and entrusted his possessions to them. 15) To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to another one talent, depending on each one’s ability. Then he went on a journey. Immediately 16) the man who had received five talents went, put them to work, and earned five more. 17) In the same way the man with two earned two more. 18) But the man who had received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master’s money. 19) After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20) The man who had received five talents approached, presented five more talents, and said, “*Master, you gave me five talents. See, I’ve earned five more talents.*” 21) His master said to him, “*Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy.*” 22) The man with two talents also approached. He said, “*Master, you gave me two talents. See, I’ve earned two more talents.*” 23) His master said to him, “*Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy.*” 24) The man who had received one talent also approached and said, “*Master, I know you. You’re a harsh man, reaping where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t scattered seed.*” 25) *So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.*” 26) His master replied to him, “*You evil, lazy servant! If you knew that I reap where I haven’t sown and gather where I haven’t scattered,*” 27) *then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and I would have received my money back with interest when I returned.* 28) *So take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents.* 29) “*For to everyone who has, more will be*

given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 30) And throw this good-for-nothing servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Last week we confirmed that God’s financial plan for His church and for each one of us can be narrowed to one issue – tithing. Giving the tithe, or the tenth, invokes **The Trust Test: Can God trust you and Do you trust God?** Can God trust you to give what belongs to Him? One of the oldest biblical principles is that the tithe belongs to the LORD. So, can God trust you to bring to Him your tithe. The second part of the trust test: Do you trust God to bless and multiply what remains after you bring your tithe? The prophet Malachi announced that bringing the tithe to the storehouse would open the windows of heaven and God’s blessings pouring out.

We can expand this trust test regarding the tithe to **The Entrust Test: Everything belongs to God; therefore, God entrusts us with stewardship of what’s His.** The Entrust Test applies to the broad principle of biblical stewardship. Stewardship in the Bible defines and describes how we live our lives. Stewardship is a sacred trust. The Entrust Test asserts that everything belongs to God – God is the creator and owner of all things. Genesis 1:1 – *“In the beginning God created...”* Psalm 24:1 – *“The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord.”* Therefore, since everything belongs to God, He entrusts us with stewardship of what’s His. Jesus’ parable of the talents defines three dimensions of personal stewardship.

1. **God entrusts us with Responsibility.** Each servant of the parable received talent. We define talent as a special natural ability – she’s a talented musician – he’s a talented athlete. In New Testament times, a talent was the highest value of currency in the Roman Empire, equal to 6000 denarii. A denarius was equal one day’s wage, so 6000 would be 17 years of wages. The point is that the master entrusted his servants with a huge sum of money and each servant received talent according to individual ability. The servant with much ability was given five talents; the servant with average ability received two talents; the servant with minimal ability received one talent. The talents represent opportunities according to individual abilities. If five talents were given to a person with minimal ability, he/she might possibly be overwhelmed by the heavy responsibility. But if only one talent were given to a person of great ability, he/she might be disgraced or degraded. (I’m glad to know this because I’ve sometimes wondered why God has

not chosen to bless me with a large sum of money. You'll not find my name on a list millionaires – you won't find my name on a list of potential significant donors) **God entrusts us with responsibility according to individual ability**. The greater the value – the greater the sacred trust. Each one of us is responsible for what has been entrusted to us. I'm not responsible for your stewardship and you're not responsible for my stewardship. And, I have no right to compare or value my stewardship responsibilities against your stewardship responsibilities. Can God entrust you with responsibility?

2. **God entrusts us with Dependability**. In the parable, each servant responded to his stewardship responsibility. Two responded with immediate eagerness – the one who received five talents doubled the amount to ten talents and the one who received two talents double the amount to four talents. No procrastination or hesitation, but eager engagement in responsible stewardship and management. However, the servant given one talent responded with lazy uncertainty - he buried his talent and did nothing. The master's response to this servant was, "*You evil, lazy servant.*" Two servants were eager — one servant was lazy.

I've made an observation during my forty plus years in church leadership. **Much of what is not done for the Lord and His church is not done because of lazy uncertainty**. I've heard hundreds of spiritual reasons given by people for not doing something but these reasons are only layers of reason wrapped around a lie. The truth is — most of us don't do many of the things we ought to do for the Kingdom of God because of disobedience, neglect, and laziness. Jesus makes it clear that evil and laziness are twins. So, can God entrust you with dependability? When it comes to stewardship, are you responsible and dependable?

3. **God entrusts us with Accountability**. The time came when the master returned and demanded accountability. The two eager slaves were commended for their faithfulness. The servant given five talents reported, "*Master, you gave me five talents. Look, I've earned five more talents.*" The servant given two talents presented the same testimony. When the master heard what the servants with five and two talents had done, he commended them: "*Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy.*"

While God entrusts us with responsibility according to individual ability, God rewards accountability according to faithfulness. These commendations were not connected to amount, but faithfulness. This is not just a case of opportunity,

but it was an opportunity to demonstrate their true stewardship character. In each of these servants, their true character is revealed on the day of accountability. Again, the Bible is clear and specific that everything God has given us in terms of time, money, possessions, and personal abilities, He will one day ask us for an accounting. I contend that accountability is one of the most serious “missing ingredients” in the life of church. We can talk all we want to about how the times have changed, how hard it is to raise money and meet budgets, how difficult it is to enlist people to serve in ministry positions. But it all comes down to accountability. Can God entrust you with accountability? When it comes to stewardship, are you responsible, dependable, and accountable?

I leave you **Stewardship’s Two Inevitable Consequences:**

***Well Done or Not Well Done.** As a sacred trust, stewardship invokes only two rewards: Well Done (faithful) or Not Well Done (lazy). The two faithful servants received a reward of “Well Done.” When you complete a task or an assignment, there are no sweeter and more rewarding words than, “Well done. Good job. Thank you.” They were also rewarded with greater opportunity. The master rewarded their faithfulness in a few things by giving them charge over many things. Here’s the principle: If you want higher responsibility, then you must be willing to do the lower obligations. If you are not willing to do the lower obligations, then don’t expect a promotion. And, these two faithful servants were allowed to share in the master’s joy. Can I tell you something? According to Jesus, the only way to share God’s happiness and joy is through faithfulness. It’s not hard to understand how that works. If you ask me to do something, and I get busy and don’t get to it, I dread seeing you because I know you’ll hold me accountable. Our fellowship will be on edge until I get it done. Now, if you ask me to do something, and I can get it done immediately, I look forward to seeing you — I want to have fellowship. I can hardly wait to say, *“I’ve completed the task assigned to me.”* The times I dread visiting with God is when I’ve been unfaithful. And the times I long to be with Him are when I can pray, *“Lord, I’ve been faithful with what you have assigned me to do.”*

But the lazy servant received a reward of “Not Well Done.” He squandered a great opportunity. He took no risk. He simply said, *“I will do nothing.”* He also selfishly used his one talent. You say, *“But he didn’t do anything unethical or immoral with it. He didn’t use it on himself.”* No, but he didn’t spend it on the master, either. The most selfish act I can do if you ask me to do something is absolutely nothing. The greatest act of selfishness is to take a sacred trust and do absolutely nothing. But here’s the worse thing – this servant slandered the reputation of the master. *“Master, I know you. You’re a harsh man, reaping where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t scattered seed. So I was afraid*

and went off and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.” The master responded, “You evil, lazy servant! If you knew that I reap where I haven’t sown and gather where I haven’t scattered, then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and I would have received my money back with interest when I returned.

***Use it or Lose it.** *“So take the talent from him (the lazy one) and give it to the one who has ten talents (the faithful one). For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Whatever God has blessed you with — if you don’t use it — you will lose it.*