

Text: Matthew 25:14-30. Celebration Sunday. **October 30, 2016.**

Double grace and double peace are yours through our Savior who gives us double blessings. Amen.

So we were talking about what a good theme would be for our celebration weekend this year. I'm extremely thankful to a leader in our congregation who offered this suggestion. "Let's use the parable where Jesus gives his servants money and they work hard to double the blessings. Our congregation has seen so many blessings double, I think this would be good." Cool! I started thinking about some double blessings. I emailed the guys who came up with the idea for some more suggestions of double blessings. The response of things I hadn't thought of was amazing! If you just go back five years, you can see the number of adults in Bible study has doubled, even tripled when you count Vine and Branches. We doubled the number of congregations by starting Good News, doubled the number of places to hear God's Word. And doubled the opportunities for worship by adding a Thursday night service. We added on to our facility, didn't quite double the size, but.. If you go back ten years, the blessings that have doubled are even more amazing. Our church membership has doubled from ten years ago (and that's not counting the growth at Good news.). Our worship attendance has doubled. Our offerings have more than doubled. And the offerings we are giving for mission work in the US and around the world have not just doubled, but increased more than tenfold in ten years. Yes, our offerings given so more people can hear the good news in the United States and around the world, has more than tentupled, increased by more than ten times in just ten years. These blessings are all from God. These gifts are all his grace. We are not here today, or ever, to celebrate ourselves. We are here to celebrate God. We are here to celebrate God's blessings, God's double blessings.

We'll celebrate God's double blessings with this parable from Matthew chapter 25. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Three main things in this parable. A master, three servants and some talents. The Master represents Jesus. He goes on a journey. Jesus is speaking about his upcoming Ascension into heaven. But he's not abandoning anyone. He's trusting his servants to carry on the work. The servants stand us for, all believers. We are the trusted ones. And to these servants he entrusts talents. A talent was a unit of money at that time. It was equivalent to about 6000 days' wages. That's like twenty years of work. So even the guy who "only" got one talent got twenty years' pay. And the guy who got five talents got 100 years' pay. This was a huge amount of money. This was a huge trust! I came across this statement. It said that money is like manure. Piled in a heap, it's good for nothing. Spread it around and it can do a lot of good.

That's exactly what two of the three servants did. They went at once! At once! They didn't mess around. They didn't delay. They got right at it. They put this money to work. We don't know how. Doesn't matter. The point is they went at once and they worked. They worked with zeal and commitment and activity. And they worked all the time, knowing this was not their money. It was always, in their minds, the master's money. And they took the free gift of the master and they both doubled those talents. So when the day of reckoning came, the day to settle accounts, they were not afraid. Not at all! They came right up, brought the talents face to face to the master and reported with happiness, "Master, you entrusted me with talents. They are doubled now." And did you notice? Both of these servants, received the exact same words of commendation. The exact same words. It wasn't the amount that mattered. It was the faithful work. It was the zeal and love they showed the master to work so hard with the talents he had entrusted them with. Faithfulness is not a horizontal word. I compare myself to others.

Faithfulness is a vertical word. I compare my talents with what God has given me.

And so yes, there is plenty to say to us, plenty of reason for us to celebrate God's double blessings. God

gives us blessings, beyond measure. And God expects us to put those blessings to work. And God promises to bring more blessings the more we work. Let me just share one recent example of how God brings the blessings, while still using our work. Several weeks ago seven members of our church went out to invite people to our Bible 101 class. Everyone had about the same experience. A few people not home. A few short conversations. Nothing fantastic. The day Bible 101 class started, no one came. But here's what did happen. A friend of one of our members asked about and has started Bible 101 from a visit that took place later. Someone who received just a phone message came back to church and inquired about Bible 101 and started classes. A gentleman who saw our church listed in the paper came the same night Bible 101 started and attended our 2 Kings Bible study. And I received a phone call from someone who hadn't been to church in years wanting not only herself and her husband to start classes and join Resurrection, but also wants her daughter in Catechism class. That's double, triple, quintuple blessings. God used our faithful work. God brought the blessings. Just like the first two servants, we celebrate God's double blessings.

But then there's that third servant. He just really stands out, doesn't he? The rest of the parable is so happy and joy of the master and well done and doubling blessings. And then, there's this guy. "You're a jerk. You steal from other people's fields. Here, take back the talent you gave me. I didn't want to do anything with it, not anything that would benefit you." Why? Why does he have such a different reaction, such a different attitude toward the Master? Was he jealous that the others received more? Was he just lazy? Maybe he thought hard work wouldn't do any good. Maybe he's like the student who doesn't want to do homework and covers up his laziness with, "The teacher's a jerk. This stuff is too hard."

And maybe then we start to see some of ourselves. Easy to be jealous when the car next to mine in the parking lot is nicer, newer, houses down the block are way more expensive. Why is God stiffing me? Maybe we have used false humility as a cover for laziness. Someone else can do it. I'm too busy. Those people know the Bible so well. Let them. Besides, it won't matter if I talk to my friend. He doesn't want to come to church. It's too scary to knock on a door. They don't want to come. I've got what I need. I'm good. The Master has harsh words for that attitude. Wicked! You are a wicked servant! And lazy! And useless. And you will end up outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. That's right. That's talking about hell. Doing nothing is doing harm, to your soul, for all eternity.

There is only one solution to that attitude. The Master has to give his greatest blessing, a blessing more valuable than money, a blessing greater than any talent ever given. This blessing is a perfect standing with God. Poured on your head with water, sealed with God's Word. The Master has given you a perfect status in his eyes. How could we possibly think he's a jerk? The Master has entrusted us with his greatest treasure: forgiveness, sealed in his own blood. This Master is not a taker. He's a giver, a giver of forgiveness, a giver of perfection, a giver of eternal life with him forever. There's joy to be with the Master and that joy will never end. It's literally heaven to be with the Master. This is his greatest blessing. Pile up all the money in all the world and cover it with all the talents that anyone has ever been given and it will be nothing compared to this blessing: heaven, with Jesus, sharing in the Master's happiness.

That's what we are celebrating today, that greatest blessing. Double the members means double the people walking the path to heaven together. Double the people in Bible class means double the people listening to Jesus' words and drawing closer to the Master. Double the offerings means double the work we can do so more and more and more and more and more people will hear the good news of Jesus' resurrection and more people will spend eternity with the Master. There's double blessings to celebrate.

Look at how the Master gives out blessings, a little at a time. The Master told the first servant and the second servant. You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Why would the Master dream of giving more to someone who hasn't used a little faithfully? If you were the Master to whom would you give more? The guys who got right at it and worked faithfully, even though it wasn't their own? Or the guy who buried it in the ground and didn't even get interest on it? You see, the more the servants worked with the blessings and put them to work, the more they shared those blessings to double them, the more they received. This struck me toward the end of the parable. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents. Wait? He, he has ten talents? I thought the first five were given by the master and so still the master's and even that servant considered the second five still belonging to the master. But once the master saw the faithful work, the zealous, hard immediate work, the master considered those talents as belonging to the servant. The more the servant worked, the more he was given. The more he shared, the more he received.

Three years ago, we shared or invested or commissioned about thirty souls to start a new church in Mt. Horeb. And since then we have commissioned another dozen or more. And God made sure we didn't lose members. We have gained more and more. You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. We've shared several members with our church body. They "left" us but now are serving believers all over the world. How is that a loss? And God made sure to give us even more. The more offerings we give for churches in India, for helping train future pastors and teachers, for supporting our vicars, for mission work around the world, for helping Good News, the more we give away, the more we are given. We've had to discuss what's the best use of offerings above and beyond what we planned. Talk about double blessings. Talk about reason to celebrate. Talk about the joy we will share as we continue to share these blessings.

I wonder if when you first read this parable, you put yourself in the shoes of the guy with one talent. I pray that now you would consider yourself as an individual and our congregation as a whole in the five talent category. I pray you will continue to thank God for how he has doubled the blessings. I pray you will thank those members who have worked with zeal and commitment to double God's blessings. I pray you will stick around for Bible study and a meal to celebrate God's double blessings. Keep on celebrating God's double blessings. Amen.