

**Signs of the Times 4 - Use it or Lose it**  
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We are in a sermon series called Signs of the Times. We are teaching on Matthew 24 where Jesus taught about the signs of the end times and about what events will take place.

So far, we've looked at those signs which Jesus mentioned in Matthew 24. Immediately after that, Jesus revealed God's prophetic calendar. You find it in Matthew 24:15-35 where Jesus prophesied about events that would happen in the future.

After speaking on the signs of the times and the last days events – Jesus spoke five parables in a row to teach the need for believers to stay ready for His second coming. The parable of the thief in the night is very short and it serves to tell us that Jesus will come back when you least expect it – so you need to stay ready to meet Him. The next four parables tell us 4 things we should do until the second coming of Jesus Christ: worship, watch, work and witness.

Pastor Joe taught on the first two last week. Today I'm preaching on the third in a message called Use It or Lose It. Our text is Matthew 25:14-30

*Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability.*

*Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.*

*The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

*The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

*Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are 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.' His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with*

*the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

This passage is about a man who was about to go on a long journey. Before leaving, he entrusts his property and his money to three servants with the expectation that they would increase what he has given them. However, when he returns he discovers that only the first two servants increased his investment. So he tells them because they were faithful with a few things he will make them ruler over many things. However the servant who didn't increase his investment loses everything he has. That's why the title of my sermon today is "Use it or Lose it."

Today we are going to see how this parable applies to our lives. So let's begin in Matthew 25:14

*Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability.*

I want you to notice that the man going on a journey entrusted what he owned to the servants. None of it belonged to them. The same is true of us. Everything we have belongs to God. We really don't own anything. Psalm 24:1 says:

*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*

Haggai 2:8 says:

*The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine, declares the Lord Almighty.*

You see:

We are the servants; He is the sole owner.

We are the possessors; He is the provider.

We are the recipients; He is the ruler.

We are the managers; He is the mighty Lord.

It is really important that you grasp this truth. Everything you have is on loan from God. Your bank account might have your name on it. Your mortgage might be in your name. The car you drive might be registered to you. The banker, the teller and the car dealership might think it's all yours, you might think it's all yours, but the truth is none of it belongs to you. Until we recognize this truth, we will not be good managers of what has been entrusted to us.

Notice also that the owner gave each one talents.

In Bible days, a talent was a sum of money. According to *New Nave's Topical Bible*, someone who had five talents was a multimillionaire by today's standards.

Although the primary application here is money, we can also apply this to the gifts and abilities each of us have. Whether it's about money or abilities God is the source of everything. And He distributes money, and abilities or talents as He sees fit.

He obviously didn't give each person the same amount. That sometimes is really hard for me to accept. Not when it comes to money, but when it comes to giftings and abilities. Maybe it's because I think of myself as *maybe* a 2-talent person married to a 5-talent person.

Pastor Joe is a 5-talent person. He is a brilliant preacher. He's gifted musically. He has a great memory and great comprehension. He knows something about almost everything.

Now just take everything I just said and think the opposite. That's me. Seriously, I'm not putting myself down I'm just being real. I have to work twice as hard as Pastor Joe to get the same results. But that's OK. I just work harder. I'm not going quit just because it's hard. Besides, I have Pastor Joe to help me. I may be a 2-talent person but He's made me look like a 5-talent one. And there are areas where I am a 5-talent person.

Here's the point I'm trying to make: God is the one who decides how much money and gifts each of us have. It might not seem fair, but God knows what each of us needs. Jesus said the servants received talents "each according to his ability." The same is true of us. Our giftings are tied to our ability. God isn't concerned about what's "fair". He's concerned about what's best for His kingdom.

For example, I don't have the ability to sing like Du'Waine or Michelle anyone on the Praise Team. I could practice all day every day and I'll never be as good as them. I'm not wired that way. I'll never play guitar like Zac or bass like Rex. It's just not my gift. But none of them can preach or pastor like I can. All of us have different gifts and together with everyone else here we make up the church and that glorifies God. Listen to 1 Cor. 12:4-7 and 11.

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines.*

God knows how each of us is wired and He knows what we need in order to accomplish His kingdom purposes. Whatever talents or giftings you have are exactly what you need to accomplish the purpose He has for you. He knew what He was doing when He designed you.

You are unique and no one else can fulfill the purpose you are called to. Besides, it's never good to compare ourselves to one another. 2 Cor. 10:12-13 says:

*We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.*

One reason it's not wise to compare is because it can cause jealousy. Next time you're tempted to be jealous remember what Jesus said in Luke 12:48

*From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*

You see the one who has been given more will have more required of him. Their labor will be harder. We see this principle at work in verse 16.

*The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.*

This guy didn't waste any time. He immediately took what he was given and went to work.

Many times we procrastinate and miss the very opportunity God has for us then we're jealous of the person who didn't procrastinate. Some of you here today have ideas or dreams but you're not doing anything about it. But if you don't use it you will lose it. And if you want to increase you must work at it. That's how we stay ready until the Lord's return...we work and serve in His kingdom.

Not serving is a contradiction to Christianity. A sign of a true Christian is service and giving. A Christian who is not serving and giving is inconsistent with the teaching of Christ.

Philippians 2: 5-7 says we should have the same attitude as Christ and He had the attitude of a servant.

Matthew 25: 20-23 tells us about the two faithful servants.

The one who received five talents produced five more.

The one who received two talents produced two more.

Because these servants were faithful with what the Master gave them, the Master gave them more. They used it so they didn't lose it. They received the master's praise and his promotion.

If we want God's praise and God's promotion we must show increase.

We do that by giving and serving.

We must use it or lose it.

In contrast - verses 18 and 24 describes a faithless servant.

V 18 says he dug a hole and hid the Masters' money.  
V 24 says he then blames it on the Master.

*Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are 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...*

One reason this wicked servant failed was because he had a wrong concept of the master. One reason we fail is because we have a wrong concept of God.

We see God as unreasonable: demanding something from us without giving us the resources or abilities to accomplish the task. We blame God for our lazy, slothful, unproductive behavior. We think God is withholding from us or expecting too much of us.

But that's not the God I serve.  
My God is generous and giving and equips me for every good work.  
God is full of love and delights in giving good gifts to His children.  
God is watching and willing to bless everyone who comes to Him.  
This is my God.

And God will never ask something of us without giving us the ability to do it.  
So we are without excuse. Listen to the masters' response to the lazy servants' excuses in Matthew 25:27

*Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.*

Master didn't accept any excuse for a lack of increase because there is no excuse for laziness.

Listen church, God has never been your problem. God presently is not your problem and God never will be your problem. You are your problem. Not God, not your employer, not your boss, not your spouse or your friends or your children... you are your own worst enemy.

And if you fail to realize this you might end up like the wicked servant. Matthew 25:28 says:

*Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.*

If you don't use it you will lose it. Even the little you have will be taken from you. And you'll only have yourself to blame. That's what Jesus meant when He said in verse 29

*For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.*

Here's the bottom line: If you're not faithful to use what God has given you, eventually even what you have will be taken from you. You must use it or lose it.

And verse 26 tells us one reason why we aren't faithful:

*"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant!"*

The Greek word here for lazy means to be slow, to delay, to be sluggish or slothful. Encarta Dictionary defines lazy as not wanting to work or make an effort.

In verse 30 the Master calls this servant "worthless and unprofitable." This comes from the Greek word meaning useless and good for nothing. Hebrews 6:11-12 says:

*We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

I see people who think because they are only one talent people they don't have to do anything. They would rather neglect their one talent than try to increase it. They're the ones who will hear this message and do nothing about it. But if you don't use it you will lose it.

So stop making excuses for your laziness.

"Well I'm just not as gifted as others"

"I'm just not that smart"

"I don't have a very good education"

"I'm so undisciplined"

"I'm not very creative"

"I don't have a lot of energy"

"I'm too busy."

Some of you here today have dreams that you're not pursuing because of all the excuses you give yourself. You've convinced yourself that you'll fail so you hid your talent in a hole and settled for a mediocre life. What you don't realize is that you have fallen into the hole you dug.

So you lay around watching TV or playing too many video games instead of getting up off the couch and pursuing your dreams. Proverbs 6:9 says:

*How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?*

Verse 25 of Matthew also says the servant was afraid. Some of you never take the first step toward increase because you're afraid of the uncertainty of the second step.

What if fear of the second step had kept Peter from taking the first step out of his boat? He never would have walked on water.

Fear of failure can rob us of what God has for us. That's what happened to the lazy servant in verse 30

*And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Jesus concludes this parable by condemning this worthless servant to hell.

Aren't you glad you're this doesn't describe you? Pastor Joe and I are so thankful for a church full of people who love to give and to serve. GFC wouldn't be where it is today without every one of you.

Today I encourage you to keep giving and keep serving.  
 Because if you want to increase you must give.  
 If you want to increase you must serve.  
 You must plant seed if you want a harvest.  
 You must use it or you will lose it.

When Jesus comes back – we need to be worshipping Him, watching for Him and working in His kingdom.

There are some of you here today that God wants to use in the Children's ministry or men's ministry or women's ministry or some other ministry.  
 You must use it or you will lose it.

I end this message with a challenge to every single one of us.  
 Let's not just be hearers of the word, let's be doers.  
 Let's use it so we won't lose it.

When Jesus comes back, may He find us worshipping Him in spirit and in truth!  
 When Jesus comes back, may He find us watching and waiting for His return.  
 When Jesus comes back, may He find us giving, serving and working in His kingdom!

We will all stand before the Lord one day and we want to hear Him say:  
 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

May you be filled with the joy of the Lord as you do the work of the Lord!