

Victory of the Lamb – Thanksgiving Eve 2021 – Before You Lose Your Faith
Matthew 25:14-30 Pastor Bill Limmer

Do you like surprises? True story. At a Bayside Church Conference in Roseville, CA, a staff member called in an order for a large pizza to be delivered. About thirty minutes later with conference still going on, the delivery person, a single mother, arrived with the pizza. She was greeted by the welcome staff and escorted to the conference area. She stood just off stage waiting for the speaker to stop. Well, the speaker stopped, only to call her to come out on stage. Surprise.

She walks out on-stage wearing jeans, a black short sleeved shirt, revealing the large tattoo on her right arm with pizza box in hand. With everyone watching, the speaker asked how much it was. She answered \$26.06. The speaker in front of the hundreds said, here is \$40.00 and you can keep all the change for the tip. That is just over a 50% tip. I think if everyone in the restaurant industry received 50% tips there wouldn't be signs seeking employment on restaurants. Those jobs would be filled quickly.

But after he gave her the 40 and told her to keep the change. The hundred in attendance chuckled. Because they knew about the surprise. The speaker then told the single mom/delivery person we actually want to give you a bigger tip. So we took a collection. And we are going to give you what we collected as the tip. So here it is \$3400 plus dollars. And the crowd erupted in cheers for the delivery person. Surprise. She was so surprised and shocked by their generosity that she literally stumbled out to her car.

Tonight, as we celebrate Thanksgiving, we are wrapping up our Before you lose your faith series. A lot of people have left the church or are considering leaving the church because they feel that the church is all about money. You might be surprised by the generosity of God!

As we look at history it is the church that has used its time, talents, and money to meet the needs of the community. The early church in Acts 2 sold their possessions and gave to every who had need. In Acts 6 they formed ministries to take care of widows. In 1 Corinthians 16 they established treasuries to take care of the needy in distant communities. The concept of the Godparents at a child's baptism was that if the parents died the God-parents would take the child into their home and adopt them into their family and take care of them. Christianity set up the first hospitals, operated institutions to take care of the poor, the Red Cross was started by Christian Jean Durant. Christianity has a long and full history of generosity.

Where does this compassion and generosity come from? Let's see. Matthew 25:14-16 It is a parable. So an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. And so as I read this to you, know going in that the Master referred to represents God, and the servants and will talk more about that in just a minute, refer to you and me. ¹⁴ **"Again, it (the kingdom of God) will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,^[a] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.**

The word servants is not the word for employee. This is not the word for the person who can quit their job, or look for another job, or just go out on her own and start her own company. The word servant here is really the word slave. Now first century Romans slaves were not ethnocentric slaves, like slavery in earlier US history. Slaves in this period of time came became slave most commonly by one of two ways: 1) their country was overtaken and they became slaves to the conquering country or 2) bankruptcy. Someone ran on hard economic times – this was before there were bankruptcy laws. And if someone invested highly in something and it didn't pan out this person might have to sell themselves and even their family into slavery to pay off the debt. What this means in first century Romans slaves were not from just one ethnicity and that some slaves might be more intelligent more gifted than their master.

If your are uncomfortable with the designation of being a slave understand, and many of you will know this, Scripture tells us we are either slaves to sin or slaves to Christ.

So that is the background on the servant/slave concept. But did you catch the surprise. The Master entrusted his wealth to slaves. And we are not talking about \$5. We are talking for the one who received 5 bags, 5 million, 2 bags 2 million, one bag one million dollars. Wow! Surprise! Smiles all around right?! He entrusts his wealth to them and says, See you later. I will be back. Know that everything you have, every relationship you have, every ability you have, everything is from God. KJames 1:17 **Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.**

Well in the middle of all this generosity, I know what some of you are thinking. That's not fair. How come one got five and one got two and one got one? What's with that? Here is a key point for us. We often worship the bag instead of the bag giver. And since we worship the bag, instead of the bag giver we feel bad for the guy with one bag instead of marveling in joy the generosity of the bag giver.

To say that the Master is generous is an understatement. To say that the slaves were blessed is an understatement. And the Master gave to each one according to their ability. This isn't a one size fits all gift. The gift giver is too good for that. This is a gift

that is for each one as if they were the only! Each one according to their ability. Generosity.

Quick question. Do you think God has gifted you as a 5 bag person? A 2 bag person? One bag person?

Let's see what the people do with the generosity that was extended to them. **The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.**

The slave who received the five bags of gold went out at once and put his master's money to work. He knew that it was his job to improve his master's assets. To invest, to work hard, to take care of. So also, the second one knew that his job was to improve his master assets, so he went out immediately and began to work. The one who had received one bag went out at once and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

²¹ "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!'

²² "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'

²³ "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!'

If you go back to Roman slavery let alone American slavery, if the slave did what they were supposed to do, the master would come home and expect the slave to continue to work by serving the master. But that is not what happens here. Did you catch the surprise of generosity of the master? The slaves were only doing what they were supposed to do, and the Master rewards them with more responsibility and with this beautiful gift – come and share in your Master's happiness. Slaves don't share in the

Master's happiness. But surprise here they do! That tells us something about the Master doesn't it?

²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold 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. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

²⁶ "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? 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.

²⁸ "'So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

What's the difference? The one with one bag even though great generosity was shown to him didn't know his Master. He knew of him but he didn't know him. And so he was afraid.

A billboard on the highway stated, "Don't make me come down there." – God. I wonder how often we think of God in that way. We think of him as an angry father, disgusted with how we and others are doing life. And when he shows up, we will be sorry. However, that is not the heart of God: Titus 3:4-5 says **But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,;** In a few weeks we will be celebrating when God did come down here, he didn't come down to condemn the world but to save our lives and the lives of the world. And his gift of love is independent of how we are acting. It is unconditional love.

Do you know God? Or do you know of him? Or perhaps you have simply forgot how generous he is. When our relationship with God is based on fear of doing enough right things to please him and to convince him to love us, we don't know him very well. When our relationship with God has its roots in his deep love for us, we live in freedom, love, joy, and whimsical generosity because we know Him and that he already loves us

If God never does anything else for me, he has been so good to me. He has already canceled all my sins. He did not treat me as my sins deserve. He gives me purpose for living. He gave me hope/ He called and brought me into his kingdom. That is the best gift ever. How generous is God? He gives us 5 bags, 2 bags, and 1 bag. Each according to our ability. And then he gives even more. He gives himself. Not of himself, He gives the whole self on the cross to pay the whole debt of the sin of the world.

God is generous. He loves you. He has invested in you everything you have. He has invested in you everything he is.

Now we get to respond. Now it's your turn to be generous because God will provide, God will always provide.

Ushers it is time for the offering. Usually, at Victory our offering time is only for our members and regular attenders but since it is Thanksgiving time we want all the families here to join. Here is the thing though – the offering is already in the basket. Surprise, especially for our guests right?

For those of you worshipping online you have a couple of options. By giving us your address will mail you a gift card for \$25 for you to live generously or, you can let us know you want us to donate it to the Waukesha Community Fund to assist in the tragedy and crisis that happened there this past Sunday. Who has a 5 or 10? Good. Because we didn't put any fives or tens in? Who received a 20? Who received a \$50? Who received \$100?

Between our online worshipers and those of you here at the MC we are investing up \$7,000 this year to make a difference in our community and the communities that are represented here at the MC and online.

Now we want you to surprise our community by sharing the love of our generous God who provides. Feel free to come up with ideas of your own or choose one of the options we gave you on the half sheet. Feel free to add to it. Feel free to talk around afterwards when we are eating pie and team up. By the way, if you happen to need the money yourself, surprise it's for you.

And as you are generous understand you just might be the answer to someone's prayer. Your generosity just might be the encouragement that someone needs. Your generosity might just be the spark that leads someone to seek out Jesus. You see before you lose your faith, see that God is the first and most generous giver. Because when you get to know God, you know that in unconditional love **God will provide.**