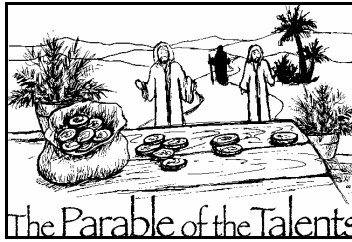


# THE TALENT OF OVERCOMING OPPRESSION



*Scripture:*

**Luke 19 and Matthew 25**

*(The words from the Book of Luke were read by Dr. Peter Maier  
and the words from the Book of Matthew were read by Mrs. Alice Crouch.)*

*Luke 19:11 As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.*

*12. So he said, 'A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return.*

*13. He summoned ten of his slaves, and gave them ten pounds, and said to them, "Do business with these until I come back."*

Matthew 25:14 'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them;

15. to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

*Luke 19:14 But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We do not want this man to rule over us."*

Matthew 25:16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents.

17. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents.

18. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.

*Luke 19:15 When he returned, having received royal power, he ordered these slaves, to whom he had given the money, to be summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by trading.*

*16. The first came forward and said, "Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds."*

*17. He said to him, "Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities."*

Matthew 25:20 Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents."

21. His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."

*Luke 19:18 Then the second came, saying, "Lord, your pound has made five pounds."*

*19. He said to him, "And you, rule over five cities."*

Matthew 25:22 And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents."

23. His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."

*Luke 19:20 Then the other came, saying, "Lord, here is your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, 21. for I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow."*

Matthew 25:24 Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed;

25. so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.

*Luke 19:22 He said to him, "I will judge you by your own words, you wicked slave! You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow?"*

*23. Why then did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest."*

Matthew 25:26 But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?"

27. Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.

28. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents.

*Luke 19:24 He said to the bystanders, "Take the pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds."*

*25. (And they said to him, "Lord, he has ten pounds!")*

*26. "I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.*

*27. But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence."*

Matthew 25:29 For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

30. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."



## **THE TALENT OF OVERCOMING OPPRESSION**

Thwish!!! went the axe right through his hair. If my brother had ducked half an inch less, I would have chopped off the top of his head. I am so angry! At fifteen and a half years old I am full grown and am full of the righteous indignation against that older brother of mine who has oppressed me ever since I can remember. I have had enough! I have had way too much!

Have you ever been to that point?

Dan still talks about our last fight. It was our last because I nearly killed him on that camping trip, and he never picked on me again. I knew he was scared, and I was too. I didn't know I could muster so much power and rage.

**It's like the words in that hymn we just sang,  
When Cain Killed Abel, or A Mighty Fortress,  
where you have "The Prince of darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him,"  
and yet it is God's truth that endures.**

I must say that it prepared me for the cold cruel world.

## **MY BROTHER**

I love my brother, and I know that he loved me in his own way because although I was his picking boy – he would beat me up on a regular basis – and I suppose that made me humble and malleable. But when anyone else would pick on me in my young life, he would beat them up!

## **DEALING WITH OPPRESSION**

How to you deal with oppression? Do you submit? Do you put up with it for a while until you are fed up? Do you escape? What's the alternative? Slaughter? Mayhem? How long does it take to recover? Who can help? Can you get over the feeling of failure, get out of this mess and get on with life and make it good? Do you still keep on guard? Once burned, twice shy.

I know you all have personal stories of being oppressed. I am your pastoral counselor; I have

heard a lot of them. I'm not going to repeat them because pastors keep such things in confidence. But I know that it can hurt your life.

## **JESUS DEALT WITH PEOPLE WHO WERE OPPRESSED**

Jesus spent a great deal of his life dealing with people who were oppressed in one way or another.

As adults, we have learned to negotiate and work out our differences. As mature leaders in the world, we try to manage the strength of respective countries for the good of all the people.

When we look at what Jesus says, especially in this story for today or these two stories, we see there is a little bit of a difference. Often when we hear the Matthew passage that Alice read, we are taught to equate the Master with God, a loving presence. But when we read the Luke passage, we see that there is a tyrant oppressive despot who wants to be king, and the people he rules over do not want that to happen.

**SO DON'T EQUATE THE HARSH MASTER WITH GOD. THIS IS TALKING ABOUT POLITICAL POWERS, HUMAN POWERS, DEMONIC POWERS, AND PRINCIPALITIES.**

## **HARSH RULERS**

The people in Jesus' day would be familiar with those kinds of rulers, and they probably knew quite well who Jesus was talking about. You remember the Herods, the whole dynasty of those despotic rulers. There was Herod the Great who ordered the slaughter of the innocents when Jesus was born. There was the Messiah being born according to prophecy, and Herod asked the Wise Men to tell him on their way back where that child Messiah was born so he could go worship. (Actually Herod wanted to go to kill the child.) But the angel advised the Wise Men to go back by a different route and they did not report to Herod. Mary and Joseph took the child and went into Egypt so he would be safe. What a despot king to kill off children just so that his power could increase and continue.

## **PEOPLE OPPRESS EACH OTHER**

Then there was a Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded. There was a whole bunch of those guys around over a long period of time, and they oppressed the people in so many ways.

It wasn't just the kings that oppressed people, it was one another. There was Jesus confronting the oppression of the money-changers in the Temple who were cheating the pilgrims. There were the people who were stoning that woman caught in adultery because it was their purity code. Jesus had something to say about that.

There were those claiming that the tower of Siloam fell on those bystanders and killed them because they were sinners, because someone in their family had sinned. Jesus was saying no. You cannot oppress people like that with a system of ritual, of accusations.

I don't believe it, but I'm prone to ask myself what I have done when something bad happens to me. Do you think that way as well? This is the kind of oppression that Jesus came to overcome.

## **THE PURITY CODE**

Jesus was much condemned by the authorities for eating with tax-collectors and sinners because there was a caste system in effect, a discrimination about who could eat or drink or when you could fast. They criticized Jesus because even though the Pharisees fasted on a regular basis, Jesus and the disciples ate and drank.

The story of the Good Samaritan was about that purity code as well. The priest and the Levite passed by the beat-up man because their code would not allow even their shadow to touch someone who was about to die.

Jesus came to overcome oppression.

Now when you hear this story about the talents and the pounds, does it make you think about the Stock Market? A hole in the ground or wrapping your money in a piece of cloth might be the best place to invest now. Since the market loses it all, the worthless slave in this story might have been the financial genius in our economy. But look at the story. Here's what's happening. You have a despot king who is oppressing all kinds of people in all kinds of ways. His constituents don't want him to be the ruler so much that they send a delegation after him to tell those who are granting him the power that they don't want that guy to rule over them.

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever had an authority you did not want to rule your life? So how do you deal with that?

In Luke's story, there are a couple of slaves who are the toadies. They do what the master wants; they

increase his finance so that he can continue being the despot. But the one that Walter Wink says is the hero in this story is the guy who does the protest. He says, "I am not going to give you any more money than you gave me to start with. I am going to hand it back to you. You have what is yours." He did not invest it. He knew that he had a harsh and cruel master, but he wasn't going to help him out or enrich him any more so that he could continue his brutal rule.

## HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Think about it. How do you go about changing the world we live in for the better, looking out for those who need the help? Now the Bible stories are full of oppression and ways of overcoming oppression. We are given talents. (Actually I was talking with our Bible Study, and that's how we get the word talent in the English language. It's the ability that comes from this story. A talent was a large sum of money; it was equivalent to the minimum wage for fifteen to thirty-eight years, total wages for a laborer depending on whose commentary you read or how you calculate that. But it's a lot of money to be invested and a lot of power goes along with that.)

So we see the passages of scripture differently because of our experiences. For those of you who want to keep on supporting an unjust system, this sermon may make you squirm. The parable must have made some of its original hearers uncomfortable because according to the commentaries those people recognized the cruel tyrant who wanted power over them.

Oppressed people sometimes take the safest route; we try to be astute; we plan for self-care, hopefully some spiritual direction or talking with a counselor, take time to measure your soul, Sabbath rest, just like God.

## GOD'S BLESSINGS

The role of *Word and Sacrament* is to bring God's blessings to you, and so that's what we as pastors do for our congregations. We bring blessings because you put your faith in us and together we try to do God's work with the unserved people where the poor are always with us. Judgment is like accountability, but we get hope, we get blessings.

As it says in **Psalm 4**, <sup>1</sup>Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

<sup>2</sup>How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?

<sup>3</sup>But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

<sup>4</sup>When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent.

<sup>5</sup>Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.

<sup>6</sup>There are many who say, 'O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!'

<sup>7</sup>You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound.

<sup>8</sup>I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.

## WE ARE CALLED TO SERVE

How does fear affect you life, your mission, your ministry, your integrity? Who are the people who need to be lifted up? Jesus sought them out in his ministry. The gospels are full of these stories about the outsiders, the socially marginalized. For us it would be the homeless, the immigrants, the gays, GLBT, the racial minorities, the skinheads. You can make up your own list of the people *who are not like us*, the people we look down on, the people that cause us difficulty and trouble. Yet these are the people that we are called to serve as Jesus served.

So who are you in the story, this parable from Luke, from Matthew? What is the plot? How do you serve God and the principalities and powers of this earth? This is the challenge to the Christian community and to each of us as individual Christians.

**From Psalm 31:** <sup>1</sup>In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me.

<sup>2</sup>Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

<sup>3</sup>You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me,

<sup>4</sup>take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

<sup>5</sup>Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.



**Dr. Peter F. Maier**  
**Presbyterian Church of the Roses**  
**2500 Patio Court**  
**Santa Rosa, CA 95405**  
**November 16, 2008**