

Sermon: You Put Your Whole Self In

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Introduction:

I'm sure you've heard the word "halfhearted." It speaks to the fact that there are times in our lives when we fail to give our full effort. It's that middle ground (perhaps think of the term "lukewarm") when we hold back instead of giving our very best. This makes me think of the phrase "dogging it"—which means "to be lazy; to loaf or shirk duty; to fail to put forth the effort necessary to achieve or accomplish something." This is NOT an admirable quality to be sure!

And yet—I wonder how many of us are "dogging it" a bit in terms of our spiritual life? We're not quite putting forth the effort necessary to achieve or accomplish all that God has in mind for us.

- Do you believe this is true?
- Have you ever been guilty of dogging it in your walk with the Lord? Why? What do you think causes this?
- What is the opposite of dogging it in our spiritual life?
- Can you think of any examples of people who show you what it looks like to give God your very best?

This morning, we are talking about "putting our whole self in." It's a reference, of course, to the old song "The Hokey Pokey." The song begins by having us put our hand in—or put our foot in. But the culmination of the song calls us to put our whole self in. This is precisely what God calls us to do in terms of our spiritual life.

Jesus gets at this truth very clearly in **Matthew 25:14-30**. This passage is a parable—which literally means "placing beside". In essence, a parable is a comparison or an illustration. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain about 30 of these stories while John's gospel contains no parables but does use figures of speech. A parable is a story taken from real life (or real life situation) from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn. They are not fables (talking animals/walking trees). They are not allegories where every detail has hidden meaning. They are basically an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

I grew up referring to this passage as "The Parable of the Talents". The New International Version now calls this "The Parable of the Bags of Gold". Either way—the focus of the story is on each of us using our unique gifts and abilities to make a difference in someone else's life. While the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (the preceding verses) stresses the need to be prepared, the Parable of the Talents seems to emphasize stewardship and accountability to the Lord while we wait for His return. Jesus is teaching the disciples and us that nothing we have is truly ours. All that we have has been entrusted to us so that we may use it for God's kingdom. We all have been given "talents" not to waste—but that we might multiply that which we have been given for God's glory. This parable speaks to the importance of stewardship but also speaks to the truth that Jesus will return and hold people accountable for what they have been entrusted with.

Examination:

- Read **Matthew 25:14-30**
 - Describe the events in this parable.
 - How would you put in your own words what the main theme or the central point of this parable is?
 - What is the significance of the amount of talents being given to each servant “according to his own ability” (v. 15)? What does this verse teach us about God?
 - What do we learn from Jesus about verse 19? If what Jesus is teaching us in this verse is true, why do you think so many waste the “talents” that they have been given?
 - Notice that the first two servants were not rewarded according to who had the most amount of talents, but according to their faithfulness of what they were given. What does this teach us about how we are created—and how God will judge each person? How can it speak to a person who is a missionary in an “unreached area” or a person holds babies in a nursery?
 - Read and discuss this statement: *When our life is over, our eternal destiny will be based on our faith in Jesus. Salvation is by grace, not through our good works (Eph. 2:8-10). However, we will be held accountable for what we do with what we have been given by God. He has given us talents and made an investment in our lives and He expects a return on it. By God’s grace, we are made aware of Jesus’ return to settle accounts, but our motivation should not be from fear, but from the joy and gratitude of being entrusted talents by the Lord to serve Him and produce fruit for His kingdom and for His glory.*
 - What does this entire parable teach us about God?
 - What it teach us about us?
 - Is there a command to be obeyed in this passage?
 - What has God revealed in your life that needs changing?
 - If you have ever struggled with what you have been gifted with compared to others (and we all have), how can this parable help you gain a better perspective on this issue?
 - What are some ways that we can determine our “talents” or gifts that God has entrusted us with? Ask people in the group to share how they are using their God given gifts to serve Him. How did they identify those gifts?
 - The last servant went and “hid” his talent. What is Jesus trying to teach us about this servant? What are some ways that we “hide” our talents today?

Application:

Think about the excuses that we often make as to why we don’t give God our very best. How does this parable remove any excuses for serving the Lord and producing fruit for His kingdom? What areas of stewardship in life is God calling you to apply to your own life from this parable (e.g. how you spend your money, or your time, or your gifts/talents/abilities)? What area do you struggle being faithful with the most? **Read Ephesians 2:10**, and meditate on what God is saying directly to you about His purpose for your life.