

November 19, 2023 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Your Life Has Meaning and Purpose!

I can't seem to forget the one t-shirt I saw. It said, "My purpose in life is to take up space. What's yours?" You chuckle at first, but then you realize that the silly shirt gets at a deeper, philosophical question. Why are you here? What is your purpose in life. I talked with a 98-year-old lady last week who asked, "Why am I still here? Why doesn't the Lord just take me home already?" This morning, as we ponder another of Jesus' parables, we will see that your life has meaning and purpose. You have a gracious Lord and you have opportunities galore.

You have a gracious Lord

When you first hear this parable, it's easy to think that the owner is cruel and harsh. He yells at his servant and orders him to be thrown into darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Yikes! And if the owner represents God, then is God cruel and harsh? Let's take a closer look. A wealthy man went on a long journey. Before he left, he gave one of his servants/employees 5 bags of gold. (Literally, it's 5 talents. A talent is much more than just a coin. Some scholars say a talent was about 75 pounds worth of gold. That's a LOT of money.) He gave another servant 2 bags of gold and still another servant received one bag of gold. Their job was to use the gold for something good. They had something worthwhile to do. Their lives had meaning and purpose.

When the owner returned from his journey, he checked in with the three fellows. The first one with 5 bags of gold explained that he invested his 5 bags of gold. Maybe he flipped some houses, or started some restaurants or worked the stock market. He told his master (:20), "**See, I have gained five more [bags of gold].**" He was not bragging. It's more like, "Wow! I'm surprised I have 5 more bags!" The second servant said that he invested his 2 bags of gold and was also surprised to end up with 2 more bags.

Would your boss hand you 375 pounds, or even just 75 pounds (one talent) of gold and let you manage it in anyway you wanted while he gone for a long time? Probably not. But this man did. And when the guys with the 5 bags and 2 bags of gold reported what they had gained, the owner was very happy for them. Notice, he did not take the bags of gold away from them and put them in his own bank account. He entrusted them with even more! This master was anything but harsh. He was generous and gracious.

Now consider the fellow with one bag of gold. He said that he was afraid of losing the talent and that the master was a harsh man, so he buried his gold. Burying the gold took just as much effort as investing it in a bank. He had the ability to manage that gold, but he refused. He tried to excuse his laziness by accusing his master of being too harsh. The issue is that he did not like the owner and refused to do what the owner wanted him to do.

The "bags of gold" or "talents" represent all the gifts that God gives us – intellectual and physical abilities, organizational skills, a tender and caring heart, insight into people's emotional needs, a strong work ethic, a healthy body, an artistic flair, the skill to plan things, music abilities, patience, and one and on. The parable deals with bags of gold so an obvious application is that – through gifts and different jobs – the Lord has blessed each of us with different amounts of money, just like in the parable. The Lord also gives us an economy and culture and country that – even with all of its imperfections – lets us live safely and rest our heads on a soft pillow each night. God is under no obligation to shower such blessings on us. You did not earn them. He gave you your unique abilities when you were born – before you could do anything to impress him. There is no room for boasting or bragging that we have more gifts and abilities than someone else. Instead, when we pause to think of all the blessings we enjoy, we can't help but to say, "Thank you, Lord."

Our lives, however, are not always overflowing with thankfulness. We were all born with a sinfully selfish nature that is never content. And the devil keeps whispering sinful suggestions to us. We often end up acting just like the man with one bag of gold. It's so easy for us to complain that life, that God, is unfair. It's so easy to be jealous and covet what others have, wishing we had more. This mixed up world also suggests that people with the most money and popularity are the successful ones in life. That can often leave us feeling like losers. Many people you encounter in your life simply ignore you or are only interested in using you to their own advantage. They don't really care about you. It's easy to feel that you are just taking up space, that you aren't worth anything, that people would not notice or care if you were not here. It's easy to feel that you aren't really making any difference or doing any good. It's easy to feel that your life does not have any meaning and purpose.

Others may not really care about you, but your Lord does. In addition to all the blessings, gifts and abilities he has given to each one of us, he also gives us love and forgiveness. Since we could not live the perfect life, he sent Jesus to be our substitute and live the perfect life we needed in order to get into heaven. He sent Jesus to be our substitute so he could die on the cross, forsaken by God, to pay for all of our sins, so that we do not have to. We

have a gracious Lord who forgives all your sins and has prepared a place in paradise just for you. You are not just taking up space on this earth, you are a chosen child of God. You have value and worth to him. You are important to him. Through faith in Jesus, he has given you the status of a saint. Your life has meaning and purpose. Not only do you have a gracious Lord, you also have opportunities galore.

You have opportunities galore

In the parable, the owner gave his servants that money because he wanted them to put that money to work. The owner treated the one who earned five more bags of gold exactly the same as the one who earned only two bags of gold. You see, the Lord is not interested in the amount of things that you do or earn. He is interested in faithfulness. He is concerned about attitude and effort. The only servant who got in trouble was the one who did not even try. As a husband or wife, father or mother, parent or child, student or teacher, employer or employee or retiree – we all have things to do. All of our lives have meaning and purpose. Whether you are 8 or 98, you still have a reason for being here. If your purpose in life was done, you'd already be in heaven. Thankful for all of our blessings, we will use our gifts and abilities wherever we can. And the Lord has given us opportunities galore. He wants us to use our time, our abilities, our money, our faith to do the things he has placed before us. And the Lord is thrilled when we use the gifts he has given us for good things.

The rich and famous may get all the attention in our media, but the real star is the simple believer who, in spite of temptations and difficulties, uses his or her gifts and abilities to serve God and others. It does not matter if what you do is big in eyes of world or not, or if anyone else even notices it. God does, and that's motivation enough for us. A stay at home mom who dedicates her whole life to caring for her family is a super star. So is the fellow who does faithful work at a boring and thankless job to produce quality products that are needed in society and earns money to care for his family and support the gospel ministry. And let's not forget the retired or the widows or widowers who hold this church together with their prayers and offerings. Jesus smiles when he sees children doing their homework, learning more about his creation, obeying their parents and teachers. The examples are endless – Sunday School teacher, helping with some event, helping with the Haven project or a Christmas parade, mowing the grass or shoveling snow for the church or your neighbor, giving a phone call to someone you haven't seen in a while to encourage them, listening while someone needs to unwind and share their troubles and fears. As we wait for Jesus to return and take us home to heaven, we are not just taking up space. We are not just working and eating and sleeping until we die. We are using opportunities that God has given us to use the gifts he has given us in good ways. Your

life has meaning and purpose. As St. Paul wrote (1 Cor 10:31), “**Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.**”

If Jesus knocked on your door and asked to borrow your lawnmower or said that his car was in the shop and he needed a ride, or he needed a hand with a project like building a dog house, you would be glad to help him. Jesus says in Matthew 25:45 that when you do helpful things for others, you are also doing them for him. I think that as a congregation, we could do more to help support our fellow members as well as those in the community. There are opportunities galore. Although the Lord has given me many gifts, organizing such efforts and delegating work to others does not come easily to me. Maybe our Leadership Team can help me work on ways that we can make better use of the gifts and opportunities we have. Just as Jesus gave himself completely for us, we are eager to say thanks to him by helping others. That gives us meaning and purpose in life.

The owner in the parable was interested in blessing his workers. In the same way, God is concerned about blessing people. And he often does that through believers such as you. You get to be the hands, face, voice, help of God to others. What a privilege. Notice what the owner said to those who worked faithfully (:21,23), “**I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.**” He was going to give them more blessings and he invites them to share in his joy. Notice that their status is changed. They are no longer servants, but are sitting at the owner's table as friends and celebrating with him. One day, we also will sit with Jesus at the heavenly wedding banquet. Our God is not harsh and mean. Our God saves us by the life and death of his own Son – fully, completely, freely. He's a God who wants us to share his happiness – not just the happiness of standing with him in heaven but the joy that comes from truly loving people, serving them as Christ served us, and living lives that have a purpose which will echo through eternity. Each day, you can hold your head high and smile because your life has meaning and purpose. Amen.